Commentary

VOLUME NINETY-TWO • NUMBER FIVE • NOVEMBER 1991

Quotas and the Bush Administration

Chester E. Finn, Jr.

How Not to Aid Eastern Europe
Nicholas N. Eberstadt

Our Debt to I.B. Singer
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Canons
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The Second Death of Leon Klinghoffer
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Hollywood's Holy Grail
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Books in Review
Arch Puddington/
Irwin M. Stelzer/David G. Roskies/
D.G. Myers/Angelo M. Codevilla

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VOLUME 92 NUMBER FIVE *NOVEMBER 1991*

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Nicaragua

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Few would take issue with Elliott Abrams ["Who Won Nicaragua?," July] that it would be better if President Violeta Chamorro and her year-old government were making more dramatic progress in reforming Nicaragua's economy, asserting civilian control over the Sandinista army and police, and recovering the huge state properties the Sandinistas stole for themselves after their electoral defeat. We in the U.S. government and, I presume, President Chamorro herself would be among the first to agree. Given Nicaragua's suffering during the Sandinista decade, friends of Nicaragua naturally hope for quick, profound change. But those hopes don't allow us to pass over the painstaking achievements Nicaraguan democrats have made, or to write off the governing UNO coalition, even less to delegitimize the 1990 election because it didn't have the same results a *contra* military victory might have produced.

The "lesson that is resisted in today's Washington," Mr. Abrams says, is that a deeper democratization, with greater enfranchisement of rural Nicaraguans, would have resulted from a *contra* victory than from the election that actually took place. That may be so, but it is a purely academic question because, as Mr. Abrams points out, U.S. military support ended two years before the election. It is also clear that no one in Nicaragua, despite the difficulties in that new democracy, is debating how the *contras* could have won or lamenting the fact that in 1989 the United States opted to support the elections rather than press what was guaranteed to be a losing effort in Congress to rearm the Nicaraguan resistance.

The precondition for a successful *contra* policy was developing sustainable, bipartisan support for military assistance. Such a base was built temporarily in 1986 when Congress approved $100 million in military aid coupled with commitments that the *contras* would end human-rights abuses and create authentic, representative leadership. But that base collapsed amid the Iran-*contra* controversy. In February 1988, in the last effort to secure assistance to the *contras*, the House rejected by 219 to 211 an administration proposal to provide humanitarian assistance, with possible new military aid only if both houses of Congress approved it in a subsequent vote.

In the 1988 elections, the number of opponents of military aid increased in both the House and Senate. When the Bush administration took office, no serious observer—and not even the most fervent supporters of military assistance—believed the new Congress would approve it. Some urged the administration to force such a vote nonetheless to establish the record on "who lost Nicaragua." But no one thought the vote had a chance of passing Congress.

So whatever the merits of Elliott Abrams's thesis that a *contra* victory would have more decisively eliminated Sandinista power, it was not a real option.

Moreover, Mr. Abrams's argument does not appreciate the impact of UNO's electoral victory, not only on the Sandinista FSLN, but on the Left throughout Latin America. Had the *contras* defeated the Sandinistas militarily, the FSLN would have been martyrs and a rallying cry for a generation of leftists for years to come. The truth about Nicaragua—that the Nicaraguan people loathed and feared the FSLN dictatorship—would never have been accepted. The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas and the overwhelming repudiation of their rule by the Nicaraguan people—in which poor Nicaraguans cast large majorities for UNO and the FSLN won a smaller percentage of the vote than did General Pinochet in Chile—exposed the Sandinistas in a way that few could deny or rationalize. Their wholesale looting of state assets, land, and the Central Bank after the election exposed them even more. Their electoral defeat was another defeat for the ideological Left worldwide, exploding the myth that the poor and oppressed of the developing worlds welcome dictatorial vanguards who rule in their name while denying them their elemental human rights.

The pressures on the Sandinistas—political, diplomatic, and military—combined at the Tesoro Beach, El Salvador summit in February 1989 to force them to promise an election one year hence. The

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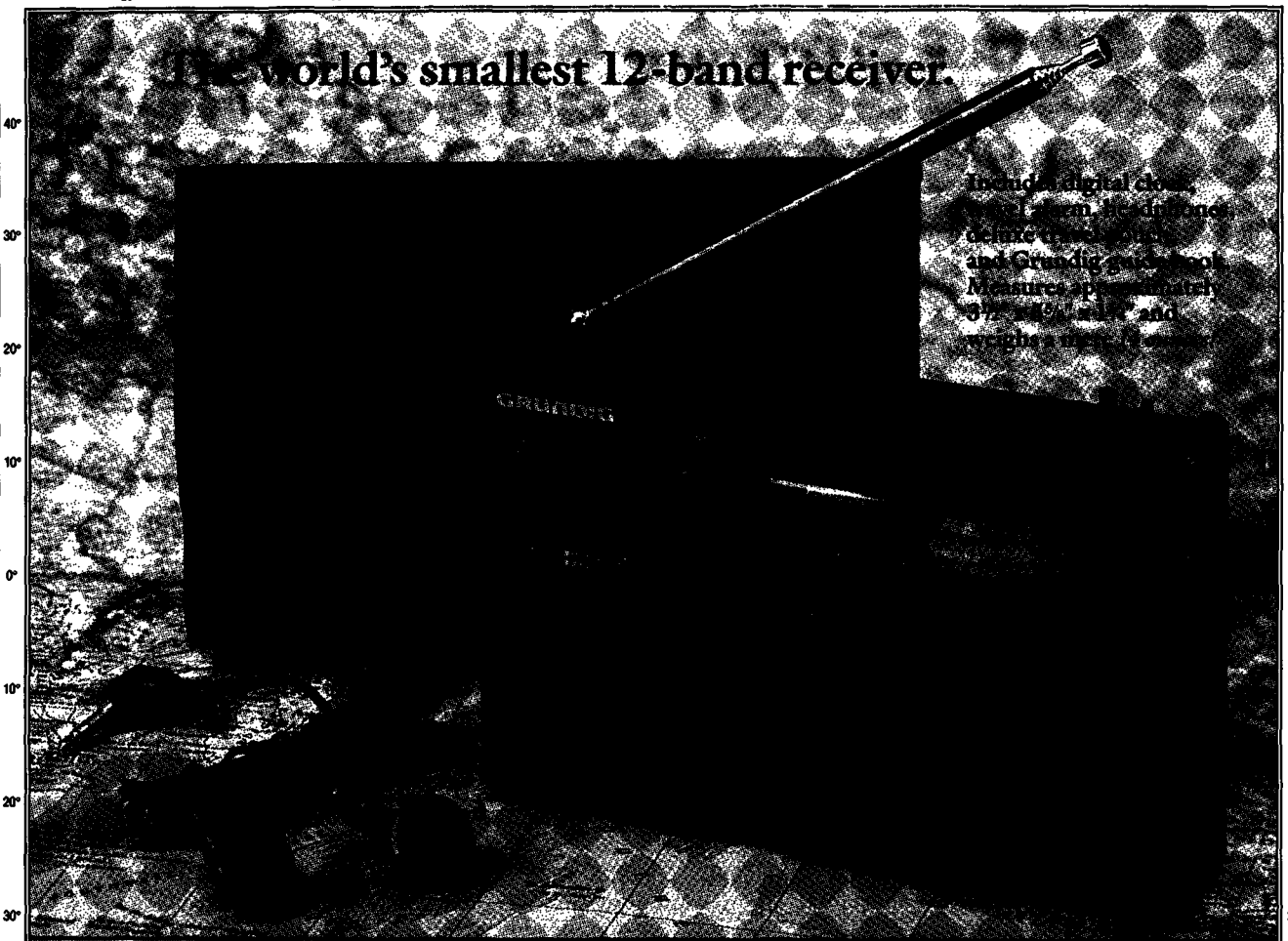

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contras reentered Nicaragua and encouraged their supporters to register and vote. In many polling places in northern Nicaragua, registration reached 1,000 voters, well above the national average of 400-500. On election day, Mrs. Chamorro's widest margins were won in the areas where the *contras* operated—Matagalpa, Jinotega, Boaco, and Chontales.

Today, one year into the Chamorro presidency, many of the people who voted for the UNO coalition are disappointed that the entire UNO program has not been put into practice. There are serious deficiencies that need to be addressed for democracy to be consolidated in Nicaragua. The police are still not subordinate to civilian authority. The FSLN seems to think the Nicaraguan army should ape the worst dictatorial instincts of rightist militaries in the hemisphere. The Chamorro government has not fully established and enforced the rule of law, particularly by protecting members of the newly demobilized resistance. It has not completed promised land distribution or resolved key rural property issues. Mr. Abrams is correct to focus on these problems. The problems do not, however, substantiate his judgment that "the overall record of [the Chamorro] government has been dismal."

President Chamorro took office in a country long on democratic forms but short on democratic practice, governed by 50 years of dictatorships that harassed and coopted opposition parties. Her opposition is an armed party that created partisan, heavily indoctrinated police, army, and civilian militias. Sandinista leaders were quick to promise loyal opposition to foreign audiences but equally quick to approve violent actions—including a July 1990 strike that was a near-insurrection—by their own supporters. Between the election and the inauguration, the Sandinistas thoroughly sacked the state, taking vast amounts of property and printing enough cash to fuel hyperinflation for the rest of the year. Last but not least, implementation of her program had to await a formal end to the war.

President Chamorro ended the war within 60 days, and now the 95,000 *contra* combatants and their family members have been demobilized and resettled. A new currency has been introduced, and after a March 1991 devaluation, its value is stable. (July 1991 inflation was about 1 percent, compared to 13,500 percent annual inflation last year.) A major impediment to agricultural development, the state monopoly on importing and exporting—which the Sandinistas enshrined in the Constitution—is ended.

Private banks are once again being licensed, breaking another state monopoly. With the solid backing of the UNO legislative caucus, Sandinista domination of the Supreme Court has ended. Privatization of state enterprises has begun with the break-up of the state coffee, cattle, and cotton enterprises. With financial support from Europe, Latin America, Japan, and the United States, Nicaragua will soon clear its arrears and qualify for new lending from international financial institutions. Led by Assembly President Alfredo Cesar—whom Mr. Abrams paints as an advocate of accommodating the Sandinistas—the legislature is working to overturn the Sandinista property grab by reforming the laws on which it was based.

Like other nations emerging from dictatorship in South America or Eastern Europe, Nicaragua's new democracy faces an uphill battle. It began with few resources, uncertain control of the security forces, a violent opposition, and an inherited economic mess. From afar, it is easy to point to areas where more needs to be done, and Elliott Abrams has identified most of them. But given the difficulties, we believe Nicaragua merits our continued, active support.

BERNARD ARONSON
Assistant Secretary of State
for Inter-American Affairs
Department of State
Washington, D.C.

ELLIOTT ABRAMS writes:

I am in complete agreement with Bernard Aronson that "democracy in Nicaragua merits our continued, active support," but I would stress perhaps more than he that it deserves Mrs. Chamorro's as well.

Mr. Aronson persuasively outlines the many advantages Mrs. Chamorro's government had when it came to power. He emphasizes her great election victory, the "overwhelming repudiation" of the Sandinistas by the voters, the "wholesale looting" which exposed the Sandinistas before the entire country. But if Mr. Aronson is right in this analysis, it follows that Mrs. Chamorro had a tremendous opportunity to govern—without sharing power with the Sandinistas.

Sad to say, she is squandering that opportunity. Mr. Aronson refers to "the governing UNO coalition," but Mrs. Chamorro's secret deals with the Sandinistas as well as her cavalier treatment of her former allies combined to break up the coalition between the President and the parties which elected her. The coalition that has in fact ruled Nicaragua since her inauguration consists of Mrs. Chamorro and the Sandinistas; the UNO coalition parties in the National Assembly are now, on many issues, fighting *both* of them.

So blatant and unpopular has this "co-government" become that some of Mrs. Chamorro's former allies are breaking with her and pushing for greater confrontation with the Sandinistas. The behavior of Alfredo Cesar, the sharpest politician in Nicaragua, is the best indication of this: he gauged the unpopularity of the government's accommodationist stance, and took the lead in opposing it. There was a huge vacuum in the Center and Center-Right of Nicaraguan politics, and Cesar has separated himself from Mrs. Chamorro and moved to fill it. Mr. Aronson notes that, led by Cesar, "the legislature is working to overturn the Sandinista property grab." True enough, but it is essential to add that this is no credit to Mrs. Chamorro, for she and her chief adviser Antonio Lacayo have been the *targets* of Cesar's moves rather than his partner in them. In August the legislature, with the unanimous votes of her former coalition partners, finally passed a bill rolling back the property giveaway. In September Mrs. Chamorro, once again giving in to Sandinista pressure, vetoed it.

Mr. Aronson is right to laud some of the economic policy changes adopted by Mrs. Chamorro and her team. International support, as I noted in my article, has been extremely generous, and combined with good economic management may produce growth in Nicaragua's economy. As yet, however, there seems to be precious little real investment in Nicaragua, and without this the international aid will be financing current consumption rather than laying the foundation for sustained growth.

Mr. Aronson is also right to remind us of the odds against Mrs.

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Chamorro, and of her achievements, and we agree on the desirability of American help to Nicaragua. That help, however, must go beyond cheering Mrs. Chamorro's accomplishments. Hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans made immense sacrifices to rid their country of the Sandinista dictatorship, and they made possible Mrs. Chamorro's election victory. She owes it to them to realize the promise of her electoral triumph, not accommodate to Sandinista power.

Heroes, Villains, Valets

To the Editor of Commentary:

Two cheers for Gertrude Himmelfarb's article, "Of Heroes, Villains, and Valets" [June], and for her continued exploration of penultimate truths. The article is, like all her works, lucid, penetrating, and provocative. I especially liked her nice and, to my way of thinking, definitive distinction between the complacently private and heroically public. With rare exceptions, all of us can be tempted to lecture Caesar dead, who might very well tremble before him living.

In my view, however, she neglects to examine a dimension . . . where public and private realms are not only transcended but reconciled. If, as I believe, "all souls are equidistant from God" (Meister Eckhart) and there is "a special providence in the fall of a sparrow," then every act, indeed "every word that proceedeth from the mouth" becomes rich with heroic or, for want of a better term, cosmic possibilities. This potential is open to all, at any moment, in any place and under any conditions, public or private. . . .

George Schloss
Princeton, New Jersey

To the Editor of Commentary:

Gertrude Himmelfarb's superb article contains one bit of wishful thinking. Contrary to a "well-known social historian," Miss Himmelfarb insists that ordinary Americans are indeed vitally concerned with political affairs.

But according to a recent survey by the State Bar of California reported in the *Wall Street Journal* of May 2, the (near) majority of Americans are amazingly ignorant of even the most fundamental legal and constitutional principles—the principles in which most of our political affairs are grounded. For example, 53 percent do not know what the Bill of Rights is, let alone what its contents are; "nearly half the state's adults mistakenly believe it's up to the accused to prove innocence of a crime"; "nearly half incorrectly think citizens may use deadly force in response to a non-lethal threat." . . . Although only California residents were polled, bar-association officials said the results would probably be similar nationwide. . . . California's study . . . appeared to be in line with findings from a national survey on constitutional matters conducted in 1987 by the Hearst Corporation. The majority of respondents to that study, done for the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, confused that document with the Declaration of Independence.

A national *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll is even more revealing, because it concentrated not on principles but on issues of immediate relevance. For example, concerning the most significant piece of civil-rights legislation in a generation, H.R.1, the *Wall Street Journal* (May 17) reports that

> neither black nor white voters have strong views about the pending civil-rights bill that has stirred intense controversy in Washington: 77 percent of all voters and 66 percent of all blacks are unfamiliar with the measure. Among the small numbers who had heard of it, most thought it wouldn't affect their jobs.

Facts such as these, combined with low voter turnout in elections, suggest that while Miss Himmelfarb's belief in the political awareness of ordinary Americans was valid for Lincoln's America, it is no longer valid for ours.

Roman A. Foxbrunner
Brookline, Massachusetts

To the Editor of Commentary:

I sympathize with Gertrude Himmelfarb to the extent that she castigates the distortions produced by radical egalitarians. Some things are more consequential than others and, therefore, the proper focus of history, just as stars are a more important topic in astronomy than asteroids. . . .

But there is a philosophical problem with Miss Himmelfarb's article overall, that I can best approach by way of Kant. Kant argues that all phenomena . . . are firmly located within the web of causality. But due to the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-as-appearances, we may rationally believe in free will. Indeed, the assumption of free will is crucial to our functioning as moral beings. For Kant, it would be possible to elaborate an empirical psychology that is strictly deterministic, and yet believe in free will. By extension, one could write from either point of view: deterministically, as a scientist, or assuming free will, as a litterateur. By a further extension, history may be approached as a social science or as literature (i.e., a humanistic study). . . .

Insofar as history aspires to transcend opinion and approach the condition of knowledge (albeit the qualified knowledge of the empirical sciences), it must seek as great a degree of rigor as the material admits. . . . Humanism is one thing; social science is another. Defending humanism against the arrogance of social science is legitimate. Trying to delegitimize the attempt to establish social science is not.

The irony is that the rejection of the social-science model has a great deal to do with the deconstructionist tendencies Miss Himmelfarb decries. If history is conceived of as a rather impressionistic study aimed at improving the character of students, then why not use it to propagate radical egalitarianism? Because it is unedifying? But the radical egalitarians think they are promoting a better society. Suddenly, it is a question of your high-mindedness against theirs. It is inevitable that history conceived exclusively as a humanistic study should become thoroughly politicized. Not only will some ethical problems always be insusceptible of strict resolution, even among those with shared moral principles, but as long as there is no universally agreed-upon ethical theory, there will be wide, and sometimes acrimonious, disagreement on fundamentals. Either admit that, frankly concede your partisanship, and argue fiercely but fairly, or escape into social science, which can more legitimately resist politicization. I fear that Miss Himmelfarb cannot steer between Charybdis and Scylla on this: one cannot attack the social-science model of history, and also attack the partisan, literary model of history. Even a centrist historian is essentially political, indeed, somewhat conservative. There is no middle course where one may write value-laden history that is above politics. . . .

Michael David Blume
Annapolis, Maryland

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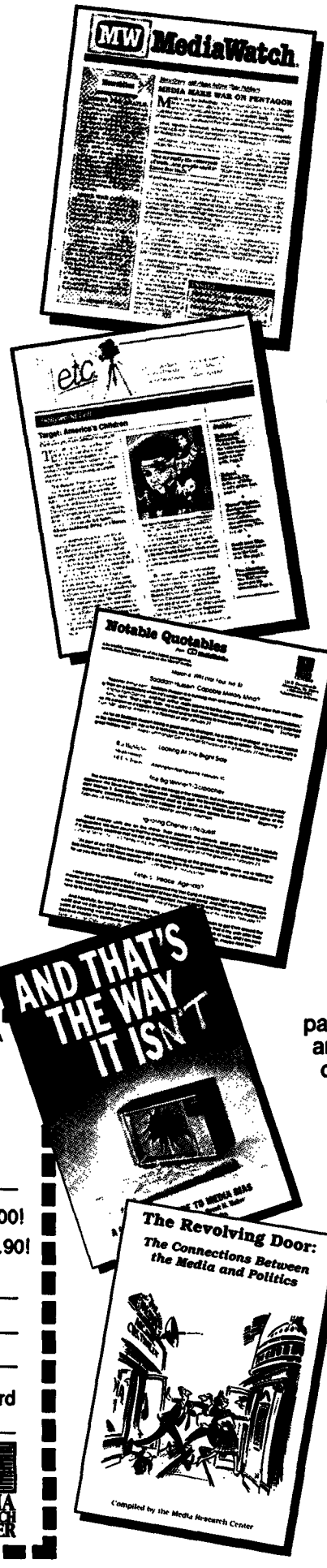

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

While I am in general sympathy with Gertrude Himmelfarb's defense of individual heroism against the attacks of the determinist historians, there is one rather glaring incongruity in her argument: her celebration of Hegel as a champion of individual heroism.

As evidence of Hegel's championship of heroism, Miss Himmelfarb cites his elevation of so-called "world-historical individuals," whom Hegel "saw as the crucial agents in the progress of history." It would be more accurate, however, to say that, for Hegel, these heroic figures are the agents *of* history. This semantic distinction is of central importance if we are to understand the full implications of Hegel's treatment of his world-historical individuals.

It is true that Hegel singles out these men—Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon—as true heroes who, through their own volition, transformed their age. "They are *great* men," he writes, "because they willed and accomplished something great; not a mere fancy, a mere intention, but that which met the case and fell in with the needs of their age." And yet, Hegel stresses that these men are merely the "agents of the World-Spirit." They "had no consciousness of the general Idea they were unfolding, while prosecuting those aims of theirs." There is clearly a contradiction in this, for to say an individual wills something requires, by definition, consciousness of that which is willed. Yet Hegel explicitly says that they are unconscious of the final object—the "general Idea." And so that which the world-historical individual actually wills is indeed "mere intention"—his own particular aims ("those aims of theirs"). It is in fact the World-Spirit, or History, working through its unconscious agent, which truly "wills and accomplishes something great." Thus the world-historical individuals, those great men who would appear to be the shapers of history, are in fact shaped by history. The free will of the individual becomes, for Hegel, merely a tool of the World-Spirit. Hegelian freedom, then, is in actuality a form of determinism, as Freedom is devoured by historical Necessity.

Miss Himmelfarb is correct to argue that it is individual free will which makes possible the existence of heroes. But it is precisely by negating individual will that Hegel destroys the possibility of heroism. She argues that Hegel allows for the heroic by permitting the individual to "partake in the universal." But again it must be recognized that by insisting that all human thoughts and actions are directed by and toward the end of history—a direction of which man is essentially unconscious—Hegel reduces the individual to an unwitting instrument of the universal. "The particular," he writes, "is for the most part of too trifling value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned."

It might finally be added that Miss Himmelfarb's celebration of Hegel is all the more surprising in light of her citation of Tocqueville. Tocqueville's words—criticizing thinkers who "attribute hardly any influence over the destinies of mankind to individuals," and who assign responsibility instead to such "general causes" as "the spirit of civilization"—may clearly be read as an indictment of Hegelian philosophy.

And so, while Hegel appears ostensibly to champion heroism by elevating the world-historical individual, the broader thrust of Hegelian philosophy is to emasculate the hero by subjugating him to the impersonal and inexorable flow of History. Thus Hegel's celebration of heroism is clearly deceptive, and it would be a shame if this Hegelian Trojan horse were allowed to sabotage the much-needed restoration and defense of the heroic and the great in human history.

JOSEPH K. VETTER
City Island, New York

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB writes:

At the risk of seeming ungrateful to George Schloss for his two cheers, I refer him to the passage where I alluded to that third "dimension" he thinks I ignore (which cost me his third cheer)—the realm inhabited by "ordinary people" where the public and the private merge. It was for this reason that I rejected the kind of history that denies to the people "any aspect of the heroic, any connections with a 'universal consciousness,' as Hegel would say, an order of being that elevates them above the imme-

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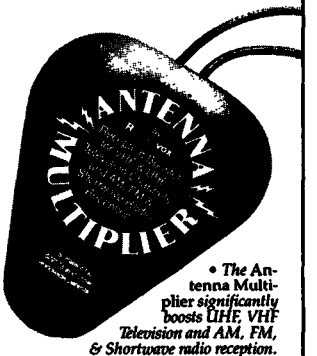

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diate, mundane, particular circumstances of their lives."

Roman A. Foxbrunner charges me with the opposite fallacy, of exaggerating the interest of ordinary people in public affairs. This is essentially the argument of the historian I cited who claims that ordinary people are too absorbed in their ordinary, private affairs to care about "who won the last election," to which I retorted that professors are no less interested in their families and careers and yet manage to be interested in elections. I do not attribute to ordinary people any great political sophistication or constitutional literacy. But then I would not attribute such sophistication or literacy to most professors (apart from those whose job it is to teach those subjects). Nor am I distressed by citizens who are indifferent to issues that have "stirred intense controversy in Washington"; their indifference might be a mark of superior wisdom.

Since I have enough to do to defend my interpretation of Hegel, I won't take on Michael David Blume's interpretation of Kant. But I do dispute his contrast between "humanistic" history, which is presumed to be "literary," "partisan," and "thoroughly politicized," and "social-science" history, which supposedly tries to "transcend opinion and approach the condition of knowledge." The particular form of social-science history that I discussed, structuralism, is itself thoroughly partisan and politicized—and unscientific to boot, since it ignores or belittles (in the case of Nazism and Stalinism, for example), the objective facts of terror and murder. Nor do I accept the suggestion that the "social-science model" is the only protection against deconstructionism; literature itself, it seems to me—as it has been conceived, until very recently, by most writers, critics, and readers—is the best defense against deconstructionism.

And now to Hegel. The reason I chose to cast my argument in terms of Hegel rather than, say, Sidney Hook (who also had some cogent things to say about heroes), is precisely because Hegel's "world historical individuals" functioned within the context of an eschatalogical (deterministic, if you like) schema of history. Hegel's heroes were, to be sure, the "agents of the World-Spirit"—but that is no mean thing, as the rest of that passage in *The Philosophy of History* makes clear:

> Such individuals had no consciousness of the general Idea they were unfolding, while prosecuting those aims of theirs; on the contrary, they were practical, political men. But at the same time they were thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time—*what was ripe for development*. . . . It was theirs to know this nascent principle; the necessary, directly sequent step in progress, which their world was to take; to make this their aim, and to expend their energy in promoting it. World-historical men—the Heroes of an epoch—must, therefore, be recognized as its clear-sighted ones; *their* deeds, *their* words are the best of that time. . . . They are *great* men, because they willed and accomplished something great; not a mere fancy, a mere intention, but that which met the case and fell in with the needs of the age. [Emphasis in the original.]

There is all the difference between a Marxist determinism, which denies any significant role to individuals and makes the means of production (and the class relations deriving from them) the necessary and sufficient determinants of history, and a Hegelian determinism, which makes individuals (all individuals to a lesser extent, but world-historical individuals most notably) the bearers of the World-Spirit. That World-Spirit, moreover, is the Spirit of Freedom. Joseph K. Vetter charges that in the Hegelian determinism "Freedom is devoured by historical Necessity." But for Hegel Freedom is the driving force of the historical process: "The essence of Spirit is Freedom"; "the History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom." Hegelian Freedom is not, to be sure, freedom in the pragmatic or empirical sense; but it does have a dialectical relationship to that more mundane sense of freedom. Similarly, the particular and the universal have a dialectical relationship; the universal is actualized, or realized, only through the particular.

One final point, not raised by the published correspondence. A private correspondent rebukes me for maligning valets, for not granting them the dignity I accord to the "common man" of appreciating the quality of the heroic in their masters as in themselves. I hereby apologize to all valets (if there still be such). I used the term metaphorically, not literally. Real valets may be rare, but valet-like souls, unhappily, are not.

Defending the Jews

To the Editor of Commentary:

I realized when I wrote critically in *Chutzpah* of Norman Podhoretz's particularistic vision of the role of Jews in America that my book would receive a negative review [by Ruth R. Wisse, Books in Review, September] in the pages of Commentary. But I expected, at least, that my criticisms of Podhoretz would be addressed on their merits. I accused him of accepting second-class status as a guest in "Christian America" when he refused to protest Christian prayer in our public schools. And I accused him of not speaking for the Jewish people when he callously described AIDS as "almost entirely a disease caught by men who bugger or are buggered by dozens or even hundreds of other men every year." Instead of answering these serious charges, Podhoretz's designated hitter childishly argues that Podhoretz's two books are better than mine. She also complains that my book was "more likely taped than written." Wrong. Every word was written by hand. Of course *Chutzpah* "describes the various manifestations of anti-Semitism in the order that [I] encountered them." It is, after all, an autobiographical account. It is also an account that has touched a responsive chord among many thousands of Jewish readers, hundreds of whom have written to me about how it reflects *their* lives and experiences as well as mine. That is what accounts for "the huge sale of this book," notwithstanding the reviewer's elitist and insulting attack on the readers of *Chutzpah*.

Mrs. Wisse chides me substantively on two counts, about both of which she is demonstrably wrong. She claims that I reject AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee]. Why not ask AIPAC whether I reject that wonderful organization? I am a strong supporter of that organization and I refer to the American-Israeli lobby frequently and admiringly in my writings and speeches. I have spoken at their conferences and they have distributed tapes of my talks and workshops. Please, Professor Wisse, learn the facts before you distort them.

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Second, Mrs. Wisse criticizes my description of Israel's initial refusal to support Natan Sharansky because he was a universal defender of rights, as well as a Zionist refusenik. She calls my entirely factual account a distortion, yet she offers no correction, relying on name-calling instead. Let Mrs. Wisse consult with her colleague, McGill professor Irwin Cotler, who worked with me on the Sharansky case, and he will corroborate every word I wrote. Of course, Natan Sharansky—who endorsed *Chutzpah* after reading it a lot more carefully than Mrs. Wisse apparently did—has not written about the Israeli attitude toward him during the early years of his imprisonment. Being held incommunicado, he was not aware of that attitude. As his lawyers, Cotler and I were confronted with Israel's stance As any careful reader of *Chutzpah* will see, I am not critical of Israel for its attitude toward Sharansky. I said it was "understandable, and within Israel's discretion as a sovereign democracy." Indeed, I went on to write that Israel's need to put its own citizens first imposes a greater responsibility on the Jewish community—*klal Yisrael*—to "undertake certain actions on behalf of endangered Jews that the state of Israel would be unwise to try." C'mon Professor Wisse, don't pretend you don't understand this distinction. Yet you had to ignore it in order to distort my point.

If the readers of Ruth Wisse's review want to know what my arguments actually are—whether you agree with them or not—don't rely on her distortion of them. And, Norman, next time why don't you fight your own battles. In *Chutzpah*, I described our debate fairly, quoting your own words against mine. In COMMENTARY, your reviewer distorts my words and then uses hot air to blow down the straw men she has erected.

ALAN M. DERSHOWITZ
Harvard Law School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Ruth R. Wisse is to be applauded for her thoughtful . . . review of Alan M. Dershowitz's best-seller *Chutzpah*. You can expect that Mr. Dershowitz will write a resounding retort to Mrs. Wisse, which will probably even become personal. This has been his pattern with unfavorable reviews—it's part of his appeals-court mentality, and a great way to sell more books.

Mrs. Wisse's characterization of Mr. Dershowitz's approach is apt. The author would rather sneer at authority than assume it. To him the world is one big appeals court, in which a good brief, an exceptional oral argument, a favorable press, and a campaign to mobilize public opinion can fight anti-Semtism, or any of the other cases and causes in which he is involved. . . .

As one who lived through the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism, quotas, overt anti-Semitism, and a world in which few Jews became tenured Harvard professors, I can appreciate that the battle against anti-Semitism was neither discovered nor waged by one individual. Who would have thought that in the year 1991 the number-one book on the New York *Times* best-seller list would have a Yiddish title?

Like Mrs. Wisse, I am unable to account for the book's tremendous success. I live in the District of Columbia near the Maryland line. The book is readily available in the D.C. library and local bookstores. Across the border in Montgomery county, to which thousands of Jews have fled in order to enjoy the low crime rate and better schools, there is a waiting list for the book in the hundreds. Most of the Jews of Montgomery county are, from my observation, quietists, except when their property taxes and schools are involved. *Chutzpah* is the last word suitable for describing them, and a word they would deeply resent if it were so used. Similarly, although some are readers of COMMENTARY, the term neoconservative is also the last word one would use to describe them. Most are old-fashioned liberal democrats.

Mrs. Wisse is certainly capable of doing an article (and I hope she will) on this amazing phenomenon of Jews who think one way and who act and vote the opposite.

ROBERT J. ROSENTHAL
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Alan M. Dershowitz does seem a bit taken with himself as self-appointed litigator for the Jews. He does not pay proper respect to others who, before him, confronted the

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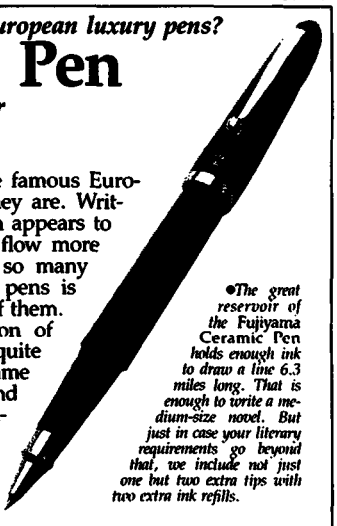

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challenge of being Jewish and American with forthrightness, intellectual acumen, and vigor. The book is too long, rambles some, and could use another edit. And I skipped over his theological saga. But, still, Ruth R. Wisse is too harsh in her criticism of *Chutzpah*. I enjoyed the book. I'm glad he wrote it. I want my children to read it.

Chutzpah is the story of a flamboyant man and thus I am not offended that it is flamboyant. The first-person prose is engaging and Mr. Dershowitz captures the essence of my generation growing up Jewish in America. Our young adult children, facing, ignoring, or avoiding their own Jewish identity, will recognize their parents in this book, which means we can ease off promoting ourselves to these toughest of all critics. More importantly, the book makes the case for being politically liberal and yet a solid supporter of Israel—a case which, if you haven't noticed, is all too rarely visible these days.

Far from moving American Jews "politically backward from manhood [neoconservatism] to adolescence" as Mrs. Wisse contends, *Chutzpah* speaks to the American Jews who haven't escaped political adolescence in the first place—regrettably they abound. They circulate petitions urging elimination of aid to Israel "for its own good"; place full-page ads in the New York *Times* telling Israelis, from the comfort of their secure homes 10,000 miles away, to empower people dedicated to Israel's destruction "in the interest of peace"; they are conned by the "human-rights" rhetoric of those who wouldn't know a human right if it hit them in the face and would certainly never extend it to Jews; they obsess over "the destruction of the Jewish soul" brought on by the responsibilities of statehood, preferring the "no responsibility-no power" life of the Diaspora.

If the freewheeling narrative of *Chutzpah* engages people who believe that support for Israel comes exclusively from right-wing neocolonials long enough to reach the chapter on Israel, it will have served its purpose. It will have disseminated more information about the Holocaust and the history of Israel than most of our children have ever sat still for, and dosed them with a sugarcoated antidote to the hateful shibboleths of the Left vis-à-vis Israel, their daily diet in the media, the community, and the campuses. We should drink a toast to Alan Dershowitz.

LOUISE STOLL
Berkeley, California

RUTH R. WISSE writes:

Robert J. Rosenthal called the shot. It was altogether predictable that Alan M. Dershowitz, the Compleat Angler for self-publicity, would use a critical review as further occasion to fish for exposure. But I am grateful for his letter because it releases me from an earlier constraint. Far from ensuring that his book would be reviewed critically in COMMENTARY, his attack on the Editor-in-Chief almost ensured that it would not be reviewed at all, since this magazine does not allow self-promotion, and discourages self-reference, in its pages—a principle so foreign to Mr. Dershowitz that he can hardly conceive of it. Now that he specifically charges me to comment on his criticisms of Norman Podhoretz, however, I can hardly disappoint him. First, I consider the designated hitter a blight on baseball and would not play that position if the future of the game depended on it; second, he should know that nobody has to go to bat for Wade Boggs.

"I expected, at least, that my criticisms of Podhoretz would be addressed on their merits." What are their merits? Norman Podhoretz is one of America's leading writers on politics and culture. His intellectual leadership since the 1970's prompted Jeane J. Kirkpatrick to call him (in 1985) an archetype "not only for a generation but for . . . our civilization, at a particular and very critical period of our national evolution." Intellectual influence is easy to claim and hard to prove, but few would argue with the *Wall Street Journal* in singling out COMMENTARY for its long-term struggle to discredit Communism as an idea, and to defeat Communism as a political force. This is the man whom Mr. Dershowitz calls a false prophet of Jewish "particularism" on the basis of some comments the two once exchanged in a debate in Central Synagogue in New York!

Thus, because Norman Podhoretz "refused to protest Christian prayer in our public schools," he is accused of accepting second-class status as a citizen. One might as well argue that because Alan Dershowitz "refused to protest" the tax system of Massachusetts, he "accepts" the economic debacle of his state. I assume that if Norman Podhoretz did not protest prayer in the public schools, it was because he did not consider it among the most serious threats either to America or to the Jews. If Mr. Dershowitz thinks differently, he has first to show why it threatens the Jews sufficiently to warrant their protest, and why it should suddenly warrant Jewish attention *now*, after so many decades of Jewish advancement and prosperity. Otherwise, he is merely offering a convenient liberal diversion from more serious Jewish concerns.

But let me go further. Though Norman Podhoretz has not made a case for Jewish *support* of prayer in the public schools, I could easily make such a case, on the very same grounds of Jewish self-interest. In the province of Quebec when I was growing up here, there was no public-school system at all but a confessional system within which Jews "for purposes of education" and taxation were considered Protestant. In Protestant schools, Jews had to recite the Lord's Prayer every morning, celebrate Christian holidays, sing Christian hymns, because one was attending, literally, a Christian school. Naturally, as a Jew and a liberal, I favored the replacement of the confessional system by a non-confessional "public" system, which I assumed would be more democratic and tolerant. Having lived long enough to see what is replacing the confessional system here in Quebec, I now do everything within my power as a citizen to retain the vestiges of the confessional schools lest they be controlled instead by the increasingly intolerant and xenophobic government that is busily tightening its autocratic powers in every sphere.

On similar though not quite identical grounds, I would very strongly caution all American citizens and Jews in particular against further weakening the already fragile role of religion in the educational system. This will not enhance the democratic freedoms of America, but will almost certainly create a meaner polity of less tolerant citizens. Were Alan Dershowitz a man of subtler understanding, he would realize that his own story in *Chutzpah* underscores above all the importance of a firm religious education as the basis of moral self-

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confidence. At this point in modern history it seems to me willfully stupid to assume that increased secularization will result in greater democracy, freedom, or tolerance, and if one has no such assurance, one should hesitate before spitting in the plate from which one intends to keep eating. In any case, it is sheer demagoguery to pretend that assertive defenders of Jewish interests could not argue both sides of this question.

As for "not speaking for the Jewish people" when he wrote about AIDS, Norman Podhoretz happened *not* to be speaking for the Jewish people in his syndicated column on the subject, and it is simply dishonest of Mr. Dershowitz to pretend otherwise. Was Mr. Dershowitz speaking for the Jewish people when he defended Claus von Bülow?

But the crux of the matter is this: why, in a book that purports to be about standing up for the Jews, does Mr. Dershowitz not credit those who do it best? Why, rather than praise Norman Podhoretz on this ground, does he attack him for his political incorrectness? In the section of his book that describes his "debates," Alan Dershowitz sets up Meir Kahane (still good as a foil, dead or alive) at the extreme Right and Noam Chomsky at the extreme Left. Knowing how dangerously close his own arguments in defense of the Jews bring him to the unpopular rightward end of the political spectrum, Mr. Dershowitz then uses an attack on Norman Podhoretz to show that he is not part of the dread "Right" and to position himself where the political bread is still buttered in the academic and journalistic precincts he inhabits. Thus does political expediency masquerade as courage.

I did not claim that Mr. Dershowitz rejects AIPAC or the movement for Soviet Jewry. Please, Professor Dershowitz, read before you distort, etc. I said that Mr. Dershowitz ignores AIPAC, and discredits the movement for Soviet Jewry, and for the same reason he so vulgarly attacks Norman Podhoretz, because they are politically responsible, while he himself is not.

Louise Stoll thinks half a loaf is better than none: she considers the Jewish people so very hungry for defenders and so desperate for champions that we should "drink a toast" to those who are prepared to stand up for us at all. My sense of the Jews, of America, of the function of criticism, and even of Alan Dershowitz, is very different. A dignified people, a democratic polity, a reading public, and a lawyer with some merit should never settle for anything less than the best.

The Media & Israel

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Andrea Levin's indictment of CNN and most of our press ["CNN vs. Israel," July] for their kangaroo-court reporting on Israel was devastating in its accuracy. What is going on here? Is this the modern guise of anti-Semitism? If so, why aren't we hearing from the mainstream Jewish organizations? Which poses the greatest danger to Jews: a few skinheads in a parade, or CNN, Peter Jennings, PBS, and all the rest rewriting history and presenting their own extremist view of Arab Palestinian/Israeli relations as fact?

Not only that, but the media's eagerness to lynch Israel has led them to ignore most other countries in the Mideast, so that the first time we really hear about Saddam Hussein is when he has invaded Kuwait. The press has a responsibility to report on trends vital to the U.S. national interest, not to focus on its own pet causes.

KARIN MCQUILLAN
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

By coincidence the issue of COMMENTARY containing Andrea Levin's article on CNN's *The Israeli Connection* arrived the same day I received CNN's reply to my letter criticizing the program. . . .

CNN's reply to my letter was evasive; it did not address any of my specific questions . . . and consisted mainly of broad generalities. . . .

Though CNN thanked me for "taking the time to share" my views, the reply only increased my frustration. I would like to know whether Miss Levin has heard anything from CNN about her article, and what she thinks in general of the efficacy of writing to protest when one sees the media smearing Israel.

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Andrea Levin's article about CNN's distorted report on Israel is but another indication of how Israel-bashers are encouraged and emboldened by the receptivity of American editors and TV producers. Another example of such distortion was an article by Amos Elon, a particularly vehement critic of Israel. Writing in the *New Yorker* in April about reports that Palestinians took to the rooftops to cheer on Saddam Hussein's Scud attacks on Tel Aviv, Elon states that although much was made of this in Israel, he could not find any eyewitnesses to such behavior.

The opinion was seconded by the Palestinian-Arab writer, Anton Shammas, writing a few weeks later in the New York *Times Magazine*. He too claimed that no one had actually seen Palestinians dancing on their roofs. Such absurd statements on the part of writers with an axe to grind are perhaps not surprising, but what are we to make of the editors of these distinguished publications for not challenging such obvious lies?

The *New Yorker* is usually fastidious about checking facts, so it would be reasonable to expect that the question of whether or not Palestinian Arabs did or did not go up on roofs during the Scud attacks to applaud, cheer, and urge the Iraqis on could be resolved one way or another. Certainly documentation of these incidents is easy to come by. There were abundant eyewitness accounts by members of various units of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) such as the following from Yossi Avraham, the Deputy Civilian Administration Coordinator in Nablus:

> On January 25 at 2:50 A.M., when warning sirens were sounded and Scud missiles were launched, there was general jubilation in the streets and singing and cheering over loudspeakers as well as citizens going on rooftops to cheer.

This incident was personally witnessed by Avraham, who the next night was once again an eyewitness to a similar occurrence—cries of celebration and cheering and rooftop excitement during siren warnings and Scud attacks. Other instances of the same behavior either during warnings or actual attacks were reported on January 25, at 9:25 P.M. in Kalkilya near the Green Line (reported by the Israeli Civil Administration in Tzafit near Nablus); on January 26, at 10:43 P.M. in the vicinity of the village of Azun near Kalkilya (reported by the IDF border patrol); on January 28, at 9:55 P.M. in Tulkarem (reported by the Israel Army post there); on January 31, at 6:07 P.M. in the streets of Nablus as well as in the Greater Nablus area (reported by soldiers of the Golani Brigade stationed in the area); on February 3, at 1:43 A.M. in Kalkilya (reported by a member of the IDF border guard). In the Gaza Strip throughout the war this type of occurrence became so routine that Israeli Civil Administration and military officials stopped reporting on it.

These reports and eyewitness accounts were not classified and were readily available to any journalist. . . . Indeed, the well-known Palestinian editor Hana Siniora, in an interview given to foreign correspondents on March 6, confirmed that Palestinian Arabs had cheered the Iraqi Scud attacks on Tel Aviv. And there also exists a communication from the Alkuds Television Production Company, which is managed by Palestinian Arabs, offering a tape on which "one can hear the sounds of cheering from rooftops in Nablus."

In addition to all this there were, of course, also many reports on American television (which Shammas, now teaching in the U.S., must certainly have seen), clearly showing Palestinians jubilantly celebrating Scud missile attacks on Tel Aviv. For example, Sanford Lechner, a producer for New York's WABC-TV *Eyewitness News*, told me that . . . his crew taped a Scud attack on Tel Aviv and in the background "you can hear Palestinian Arabs on the rooftops cheering." Lechner said this was "common behavior."

Finally, there is the matter of leaflet #70 distributed by the Hamas Muslim fundamentalist movement in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. It says:

> Go up on the rooftops and make the following declaration: Allah is Great and in the name of Allah the battle of Khaiber [the battle in 628 in which Mohammed massacred Jews] has come with the missiles being fired by Iraq at the dwellings of the Zionist entity.

So copious is this documentation that the efforts of Shammas and Elon to rewrite history are almost laughable.

The *New Yorker*, confronted by this evidence, responded as follows: "It is possible that the reason Mr. Elon was unable to find any such eyewitnesses is because he was reporting from Israel proper, not the occupied territories. . . . We have no reason to doubt that Mr. Elon was unable to find eyewitnesses to Palestinian celebrations. . . ."

When it comes to Israel and the Arabs, American editors need a "reality checker" along with the other fail-safe devices in their word processors.

RAPHAEL ROTHSTEIN
United Jewish Appeal
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Andrea Levin's astute analysis of Mark Feldstein's CNN report on the Arab-Israeli conflict should alarm anyone committed to truthful and balanced reporting. . . .

On February 20, 1991, Bryant Gumbel, co-host of the *Today Show*, and correspondent Dennis Murphy broadcast a report on the Palestinians which amounted to a total misrepresentation and distortion of the record. The Committee for Media Responsibility protested to NBC by citing the historical facts. Hundreds of our supporters contacted us and their signatures were added to our letter to the network. We expressed our determination to get after the sponsors if such biased and blatantly dishonest reporting should continue.

To our knowledge, only the *Near East Report* (March 3, 1991) commented on this broadcast and cited Gumbel's record of anti-Israel bias. It is noteworthy that Gumbel rarely tackles other international issues, but he regularly uses his "bully pulpit" for Israel-bashing. . . .

We recognize that a majority of the American people support Israel. . . . Nevertheless, it would be a serious mistake to dismiss the steady seepage of falsehoods into the mainstream of American thinking as inconsequential.

Andrea Levin's article is vitally important in calling our attention to the insidious spread of misinformation. We have some knowledge of the tireless work of CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America), of which Miss Levin is national president, but we also feel it is imperative that the campaign be stepped up by mobilizing the Jewish public

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and all individuals who are committed to truthful and balanced reporting. Such a nationwide grassroots campaign should relentlessly pillory the handful of media personalities who pose as "information specialists" but in reality seek to subvert the truth for the purpose of vilifying Israel. . . .

RUTH JANKO
ARLENE SHULMAN
Committee for Media Responsibility
Bayside, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Lacking cable TV, I am not treated to CNN's special twist on the news, as aptly described in Andrea Levin's article. But for me, ABC fills the gap quite nicely. Anchorman Peter Jennings and Israel correspondent Dean Reynolds provide a daily lesson in the art of distortion.

Sometimes their bias is blatant: wild, unsubstantiated allegations and flat-out historical revisionism. Sometimes it is more subtle: lying through omission. Often, there is no Israeli on hand to rebut outrageous accusations. And when an Israeli viewpoint is included, it is rarely mainstream—or articulate. A few examples:

On February 8, 1988, Jennings intoned: "In the Middle East today, United Nations officials say that the Israelis have beaten another Palestinian to death in the occupied territories." The only problem with this story is that it never happened. As was later revealed in the *Wall Street Journal* (but not acknowledged by ABC), the Palestinian died not from any clash with soldiers, but from a cerebral hemorrhage, brought on by longstanding high blood pressure.

When two elderly Jewish men were murdered by a Palestinian teenager on a Jerusalem street in 1989, Jennings began his report: "An Arab youth was almost lynched in Jerusalem today."

On July 19, 1990, correspondent Reynolds described how cheap Jewish bosses exploit Palestinian laborers, who must eke out a living in the Israeli "slave market." The laborers, . . . Reynolds claimed, are treated "like animals," and earn a scant $40 a day. (Reynolds did not mention that $40 a day is more than what many educated Israelis earn.)

Apropos the Temple Mount investigation, Reynolds erroneously reported on October 26, 1990 that there was "no substantiation of the government charge that the Palestinians, in addition to throwing stones at police, were intentionally targeting Jewish worshippers."

In an earlier report on the incident, Reynolds proffered another outright lie: that the Palestinian violence was prompted by the arrival at the mosque of the Temple Mount Faithful. In actuality, the Faithful were nowhere near the mosque, having been forbidden to approach the site by a well-publicized Supreme Court order.

On December 14, 1990, Jennings announced: "In Israel, three Jewish workers were stabbed to death at an aluminum factory near Tel Aviv. The killers sprayed Muslim fundamentalist slogans on the walls before they escaped. After the killings, crowds filled the streets demanding revenge."

In this 20-second report, Jennings had time to describe Jewish vengeance, but no time to mention that the Palestinian killers quartered one of the victims, beheaded the second, and eviscerated the third. He also chose to omit the fact that the murderers were members of Hamas, which rivals the PLO in its popularity on the West Bank and Gaza, and which . . . calls for the annihilation of Israel. . . .

Three weeks later, Israel responded to the murders by deporting four Hamas leaders. Jennings lavished nearly three minutes on the story, emphasizing the damage Israel was thus doing to the Allied coalition against Iraq.

Jennings's animus toward Israel was most jarringly apparent when the Jewish state was under attack by Iraqi Scuds. Why, he demanded, were Israelis in gas masks eliciting more sympathy than Kuwaitis or Saudi Arabians? Jennings turned to correspondent Cokie Roberts for an explanation. The startled Roberts had to explain to Jennings that Israel was a long-time ally. America, she noted, is based on a system of Judeo-Christian ethics. . . .

NANCY KATZ
Brookline, Massachusetts

ANDREA LEVIN writes:

Karin McQuillan is right to call attention to the grave effects on American national interests when the mass media, including CNN, focus distorted and obsessive attention on Israel, ignoring genuine threats elsewhere. The recent Iraq war is a stark example of the outright failure of most of the media

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to fulfill their role as "eyes and ears" for the nation. A look at coverage of Iraq and the wider Middle East over the last decade, as well as in the months and weeks preceding August 2, 1990, is a vivid indictment of American journalism.

A study by COMA (Committee on Media Accountability), examining coverage since 1980 in two of the nation's leading newspapers, the New York *Times* and the Los Angeles *Times*, reveals that the single most heavily reported story concerning Iraq prior to the recent crisis was the Israeli bombing of the Osirak nuclear reactor, which took the lives of two people and successfully interrupted Hussein's nuclear arms development. In the New York *Times* 48 stories, 19 on the front page, were accompanied by blistering editorial condemnation of Israel. In contrast, Saddam Hussein's gassing of 5,000 Kurds in 1988 elicited eight stories, with one making it to the front page. The Los Angeles *Times* coverage was nearly identical. Its only front-page story on the Kurds was headlined, "Old Baghdad: Mix of the New and the Funky."

Instances of distorted focus on Israel and comparative indifference to Iraq persisted in the period prior to the invasion of Kuwait, when Hussein was attempting to smuggle nuclear triggers and "big-gun" parts, when he hanged British journalist Farzad Bazoft, when he threatened to "burn half of Israel," and when evidence of enormous Iraqi imports of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons was available for journalistic investigation. Yet, with mantra-like regularity, anchormen, editorialists, and reporters continued to tell the public that the root cause of trouble in the Middle East was the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.

Unfortunately, the danger of this falsehood is still not apparent to many members of the media, even in the wake of the war. The numerous retrospective symposia, debates, and roundtables on the role of the media in the conflict have been typically self-congratulatory and sterile, dwelling on the restrictiveness of the press "pools," the courage of journalists under fire, and, in the one area of self-criticism, the lack of aggressive challenging of government policies and statements.

I have never once heard the most obvious question asked: "How well did journalists fulfill their obligation to alert Americans to the crimes and warmongering of the Iraqi regime?" Having failed to engage in such essential evaluation, journalists seem in the process of repeating their performance with regard to the menace of Syria and Hafez Assad—even to the point of now omitting from their reports Assad's involvement in the killing of hundreds of Americans and others on Pan Am 103.

In the matter of journalistic accountability, the form letter Irving Wecksell received from CNN is significant for being standard fare; it argues that because the network received criticism from both sides of the Arab/Israeli issue, it was obviously fair and evenhanded in its presentation. What is so disquieting in this mindless response to specific and substantive criticism is the abdication of a journalist's foremost responsibility—to ascertain and report the truth. The implication, of course, is that there is no discernible truth, only a number of contending "views"—an easy out for the rampant journalistic know-nothingism.

Indeed, our experience at CAMERA in correspondence and conversations with news writers, producers, and reporters has been that many individuals in positions of considerable power are completely unequipped to cover the Middle East, lacking any education in the history of the region or awareness of the realities of the wider Arab/Islamic world. Often ignorance, rather than malice, seems to lie at the heart of the shoddy coverage.

Raphael Rothstein's just concern about the role of *New Yorker* editors in affording Amos Elon a platform to make patently fallacious charges underscores the degree to which the same shoddiness has overtaken even those publications once devoted to meticulous reporting and fact-checking.

I thank Ruth Janko and Arlene Shulman for their generous words of support for CAMERA's efforts. They are certainly correct to advocate wider grassroots involvement and joint undertakings among organizations in challenging the pervasive problem of misinformation. It should be noted that CAMERA did issue an alert urging that letters of protest be sent to Bryant Gumbel and the *Today Show* after the appalling telecast of February 20. Hundreds of letters were generated, but subsequent NBC *Today Show* programs have continued to reflect a disturbing disregard for factual background despite statements by a network representative that our criticisms had been taken into serious consideration.

A clue to the continued pattern of distortion may be found in the reply one member of CAMERA received from *Today Show* producer Sy Pearlman, who revealed a startling ignorance of basic facts as well as hostility toward Israel. Among other disturbing observations, he wrote, "As far as being *extremist* [his emphasis], is Hamas any more extreme than those who want the entire land of Palestine to be a Jewish state?" NBC viewers surely deserve to know that for the producer of the *Today Show* a burgeoning Muslim fundamentalist group supported by at least 40 percent of Palestinian Arabs and advocating the annihilation of Israel and mass murder of its Jewish population is no different from tiny Jewish fringe groups, scorned by the vast majority, that promote anti-Arab policies. (Needless to say, even anti-Arab groups in Israel have no ambition to annihilate the Arabs.)

The other startling feature of this sentence is the reference to Palestine. Clearly, Pearlman has no idea what he is talking about; no Jewish group of any stripe lays claim to the entire "land of Palestine," which would, of course, encompass all of modern-day Jordan. It is difficult to imagine any other industry tolerating similar professional ineptitude in an individual of influence.

Nancy Katz usefully draws attention to one of the most serious offenders on television, ABC's *World News Tonight* with Peter Jennings. The Gulf War revealed more starkly than usual the anchorman's animus toward Israel. Despite the taboo against collegial criticism, as Miss Katz points out, there were on-camera stirrings when Jennings voiced inability to comprehend the sympathetic public response for Israel during the bombing of Tel Aviv.

But occasional peer criticism will obviously never suffice to bring about genuine improvement in the print and electronic media. Despite the disparaging and dismissive attitude of so many journalists toward public comment on their work, the likeliest avenue of reform is continuous, responsible, and aggressive citizen action. Letter-writing and telephoning to

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newspapers, TV networks, and radio stations is the first line of approach. Letters published reach a wide audience and letters to TV executives serve notice of negative public sentiment. In a time of shrinking budgets and layoffs, public approval will grow increasingly important.

CAMERA has found advertisements useful in calling attention to distortions in specific media. Meetings with media executives can sometimes be helpful as well. CAMERA also reminds its members that they have a moral right to withhold financial support from media outlets that defame Israel and the Jewish people. Encouragement of journalists who consistently provide careful, thorough, and proportionate coverage is also important.

Realism in Foreign Policy

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In reviewing *America's Purpose: New Visions of U.S. Foreign Policy*, edited by Owen Harries [Books in Review, July], Norman Podhoretz distinguishes succinctly among the political perceptions of interventionists (who wish to advance democracy in the world), neoisolationists (who focus on internal concerns and interests), and realists (who give primacy to questions of national interest).

Credit is due Mr. Podhoretz for recognizing clearly what other sophisticates have not: that the U.S. intervention in the Gulf region to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait was *not* undertaken to promote democracy. Yet should the promotion of democracy have been part of that purpose?

Mr. Podhoretz, a self-proclaimed neo-Wilsonian (alas!), who advocates active support for democracy the world over, contends that President Bush, despite his lip service to the concept of a new world order, merely voiced this admittedly vague notion while in actuality remaining devoted to the realists and their cause—stability. I am not, however, persuaded that Mr. Podhoretz, in his analysis, has been fair to President Bush. . . .

If Mr. Podhoretz can bear to wait patiently, perhaps he can come to the realization that it is as yet premature to infer that President Bush proclaims one idea but practices another. Surely he must know that one kiss does not make a honeymoon!

Finally, there is a sound way for the U.S. to promote both a realistic idealism and an idealistic realism in foreign policy: American democracy can be exported by promoting a healthy society at home. Let us, therefore, set an example—by deeds—for nations abroad to envy and follow.

ELLIOTT A. COHEN
New York City

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

Elliott A. Cohen, evidently a neoisolationist, claims George Bush for his side. But as I think I demonstrated in my review, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Bush belongs with the realists. Nor do I see how "promoting a healthy [or, as I would put it, a healthier] society at home" would make other nations wish to follow our example any more than many of them already do.

The U.S. & Cuba

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In connection with Mark Falcoff's article, "The Last Communist" [June], I would like to say that from 1959 to 1961, I was a young Senate aide with a portfolio that included watching the evolution of U.S. policy toward the Castro revolution in Cuba. I met with U.S. officials responsible for Cuba and had frequent opportunity to talk with both wings of the anti-Castro movement: at the beginning, the Batista crowd hoping for restoration and, later, the disillusioned idealists driven or fled into exile.

Based on that experience, I am quite inclined to agree with Mark Falcoff's (and Georgie Anne Geyer's) conclusion that the U.S. tried to establish friendly ties to Castro's Cuba but that Castro never intended good relations with the U.S.

Nevertheless, I believe Mr. Falcoff is wrong about one piece of evidence he adduces. The Bay of Pigs was emphatically not an example of "remarkable restraint" by the U.S. That debacle resulted from (1) a failed transfer of responsibility from the Eisenhower administration to the Kennedy administration and (2) irresolution on the part of the Kennedy team.

Perhaps unwisely, President Eisenhower authorized preparations for the invasion, which were well under way when Kennedy took office. The Kennedy administration, unable to choose between cancelling the operation and giving it a chance to succeed by providing air cover, decided to compromise by hoping that Castro would be driven from office by a mere show of force.

In short, there were two realistic choices, and the Kennedy administration opted for a third. In my book, the name for that is not restraint but error.

NORMAN I. GELMAN
Potomac, Maryland

MARK FALCOFF writes:

Of course, in at least a limited sense Norman I. Gelman is right to take umbrage at my use of the word "restraint." To invade another country, even unsuccessfully, and even changing one's mind in midstream, is not normally the kind of conduct one associates with that concept. However, to hear the Cuban historians and publicists tell it, the entire American response to their revolution from day one was one unrestrained "genocidal" (they do not shrink from the word) attempt to strangle the infant in its cradle. Now *that*, of course, is simply not true. (I am gratified that Mr. Gelman, who was there, can back me up on this.)

The "restraint" I had in mind was the decision of President Kennedy not to send American troops into Cuba after the exiles (though, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. has since recalled in his memoir, *A Thousand Days*, the unspoken assumption around the cabinet table was, in fact, that this would be the next step if the invasion force failed to achieve its foothold and the expected popular uprising in Cuba did not take place). If we had really been the monsters the Cuban regime (and its friends and apologists abroad) still claim we were and are, we would never have allowed the exile expedition to fail, much less accepted the Castro regime as a *fait accompli*, as we subsequently did in the Kennedy-Khrushchev accords. If this doesn't qualify as restraint, the word will certainly do until a better one comes along.

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Quotas and the Bush Administration

Chester E. Finn, Jr.

In spite of its admirable statements against quotas, the Bush administration still displays no consistent philosophy or clear voice on issues of race and civil rights. Its limbs often move autonomously, as if unconnected to any central nervous system. Its actions sometimes appear expedient, sometimes principled, but even in the latter instances the tenets guiding one decision may clash with those undergirding the next.

Muddle in civil rights did not, of course, originate with the Bush team. Nor is it the first Republican administration to open a gap between utterance and action in this field. The Nixon White House, despite its unshakable reputation to the contrary, led what one commentator has described as "vigorous Republican expansion of preferential treatment" in the guise of "affirmative-action" policies. Even the ostensibly ideological Reagan administration was erratic in this domain.* A superb new book by Herman Belz† shows that, on several key issues, the Reaganites codified mischievous new "race-relations" doctrines drafted during the Carter years, while neglecting to undo inherited practices that could have been altered by a stroke of the presidential pen.

But if in these respects the Bush administration has been following in the footsteps of its Republican predecessors, it has also been forced by the march of events into ill-mapped territory where there are no footsteps to follow.

Until the last few years, the federal policy dilemma was reasonably clear, albeit painful. One version—the classic version—of the civil-rights agenda emphasized individual opportunity and the rooting out of discrimination against people on account of such ascriptive characteristics as race and religion. A second and newer agenda focused on outcomes and how to make them more equal for groups defined according to those same ascriptive characteristics that earlier policies were bent on making irrelevant. Adherents of the older tradition abhorred quotas; votaries of the newer faith revered them (while for tactical reasons invariably denying that they did).

Though "affirmative action"—in the original sense of seeking out qualified blacks or offering extra training to bring unqualified blacks up to competitive scratch—appeared for a time to be a workable compromise, the principles underlying the two approaches were vastly different and conflict was inevitable. Slowly but surely, thanks in large part to the success of outcomes-minded civil-rights groups in choosing the terms of the discussion and seizing the moral high ground, the new agenda began to prevail in Washington. So great was this success that even though the new agenda had few adherents outside the Beltway, one administration after another yielded before it and failed to offer coherent, principled resistance.

So far, this picture, however disheartening, is familiar enough. But what is new, and what complicates matters for the Bush administration, is that today the civil-rights debate is being joined to the argument over "diversity" in American society. Today the familiar policy landscape, jostled by an earthquake below, is slanting in unaccustomed directions as a once-stable balance between the "*pluribus*" and the "*unum*" in American society turns into a tectonic confrontation.

This clash is keenest on the university campus, where much of the uproar over "political correctness" (PC) really involves the terms on which myriad social and demographic factions, defined by race and ethnicity, by gender and sexual orientation, by religion and language, will coexist and the extent to which institutional authority should compel people to worship at the twin altars of "diversity" and "sensitivity." Similar dilemmas face the primary and secondary schools, where the outcome is even more consequential inasmuch as young children are involved and attendance is mandatory. Parallel

Chester E. Finn, Jr., who served as Assistant Secretary of Education from 1985 to 1988, is professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University and director of the Educational Excellence Network. His new book, *We Must Take Charge: Our Schools and Our Future*, has recently been published by The Free Press.

* See my "Affirmative Action Under Reagan" in the April 1982 Commentary.

† *Equality Transformed: A Quarter-Century of Affirmative Action*, Transaction, 320 pp., $32.95.

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arguments bear upon the casts of Broadway plays, the messages conveyed through Hollywood films, and the lyrics of popular songs. They affect municipal fire departments, the make-up of the armed forces, and the redrawing of congressional and other legislative districts.

Many of these issues directly implicate the federal government. Others touch Washington only at the margin. Yet all can be traced to the same fundamental questions, questions that plainly agitate the nation and would benefit from articulate guidance by our elected leaders.

The Bush administration has yet to supply a full measure of such guidance. This may be because the President's own instincts and attitudes on these matters are blurred; or it may be that, like most political figures contending with the raw issues of race and civil rights, he has been getting mixed signals from his lieutenants. And to compound the confusion, most of the federal government goes about its business without paying much heed to the Oval Office. Cabinet members have their fiefdoms and lesser officials have theirs. Programs operate under the authority of different laws and only sporadically does the White House intervene. Hence policies developed in one part of the sprawling federal establishment can easily contradict those shaped in other parts. Frequently the outcome bears scant relation to the precepts voiced in presidential press conferences, even when these are clear.

In all this confusion, sound values sometimes manage to prevail. But not often enough to arrest the government's slow, twisting passage into that looking-glass world where diversity means uniformity; where uniformity is so important that measuring sticks may be calibrated to different metrics in order to ensure identical outcomes; where color-blindness is suspect and tribalism honored; and where tribe counts for more than personal qualities when it comes to meting out various benefits.

NOWHERE is all this clearer than in the way the Justice Department has been interpreting the Voting Rights Act during the round of legislative redistricting mandated by the 1990 census.

Often described as the most potent civil-rights measure of all, this law was enacted in 1965 in order to stamp out literacy tests and other discriminatory practices, mostly in the South, that had kept black citizens from exercising the franchise. By 1982, however, as Abigail Thernstrom has meticulously documented,* the statute was transformed: no longer just a bulwark against efforts to deter black Americans from casting their ballots, it had become a mechanism for guaranteeing that minority votes fully "counted," as determined largely by scrutinizing the skin color of those who got elected.

The Reagan administration resisted this transformation for a time, but eventually went along with the 1982 amendments. Due to the decennial census cycle, however, it has fallen to George Bush's Justice Department to interpret and enforce these newer provisions during a time of widespread reapportionment.

Interpretation matters a great deal here because the legislative language—as so often in modern civil-rights measures—is deeply ambiguous. The Act says that "the extent to which members of a protected class have been elected to office . . . is one circumstance which may be considered" by federal enforcers and judges. But at the same time, the Act also denies that it "establishes a right to have members of a protected class elected in numbers equal to their proportion of their population."

Such doubletalk—pairing one provision that all but mandates quotas with another that appears to reject them—is profoundly hypocritical, designed to allow Congressmen to cite whichever passage will placate their constituents. This is compromise of the worst sort, a stapling together of contradictory doctrines rather than a serious effort to harmonize two conflicting approaches. But it also gives a degree of discretion to executive-branch enforcers in deciding which of the rival clauses to emphasize.

Contrary to what would be predicted from the President's own rhetoric, the path selected by his Justice Department this year was the one leading to quotas. Thus, for example, Assistant Attorney General John R. Dunne asserted that a proposed legislative district near Richmond, Virginia "minimized black voting strength" by leaving some 4,000 voters "submerged in a majority-white district" rather than placing them in another district "that likely would result in . . . an equal opportunity . . . to elect candidates of their choice to office." (The assumption, always, is that minority voters, given the opportunity to do so, will unfailingly behave in tribal fashion and elect members of their own groups.) Similarly Dunne decreed that in New York City at least two districts had been redrawn "at the expense of Hispanic voting strength, causing the Hispanic electorate to be unfairly underrepresented on the [city] council."

Several commentators, trying to explain why this kind of thing should be done by the Bush administration, have suggested that the Republicans have entered into a tacit deal with civil-rights organizations and minority politicians to concentrate black and Hispanic voters in districts of their own, thereby boosting minority membership in sundry legislative bodies but also creating an even larger number of predominantly white, mostly suburban, districts that are apt to function as safe seats for Republican officeholders. Whether this claim is true or not, it is certainly clear that federal

* *Whose Votes Count? Affirmative Action and Minority Voting Rights*, Harvard University Press (1987).

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enforcers have come to view mere participation in the act of voting as an archaic feature of "voting rights," ready to be consigned to the museum of civil-rights concepts where "equality of opportunity" and "color-blindness" are kept.

EDUCATION presents a more complicated and somewhat more encouraging picture. It is a domain that has received quite a lot of direct attention from the man who wants to be known as the "Education President," and since this past spring the administration has had a solid plan for renewing elementary and secondary education—the "America 2000" strategy devised for Bush by his able new Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander. Though attentive to the special needs of disadvantaged youngsters, this plan rests on meritocratic foundations and espouses traditional values. It asserts that individuals should reap tangible rewards for hard work and achievement while in school. It responds to—and if successful would achieve—the six ambitious goals that Bush and the 50 governors set for the end of this decade (e.g., ensuring that all students "leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography").

But it is precisely this emphasis on authentic achievement that has placed the education-reform strategy on a collision course with other government policies that are wary of merit. One such collision occurred just as Alexander was being tapped to succeed the hapless Lauro Cavazos at the Department of Education.

On December 4, 1990, Michael L. Williams, the gutsy, capable, and principled Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights, announced that federal laws barred universities from administering "race-exclusive" scholarships, i.e., student financial aid limited to members of particular racial or ethnic groups. In so doing, Williams (who is black) gave the administration a wonderful opportunity to declare its unwavering commitment to a generous but color-blind society in which assistance is provided to the needy but no benefits are conferred or withheld on grounds of race and other group classifications.

Instead, the White House, stunned by the hysterical outcry that greeted Williams's decree, vacillated. First it said that it would "review" the policy, then a few days later it obliged Williams to issue a revision permitting race-exclusive scholarships in some circumstances but not in others, the distinctions resting mainly on whose money was involved. The President himself denied that there had been any policy "flip-flop" but added that "we've worked the regulation so that we can continue to have these kinds of scholarships. I've long been committed to them." This, from the same President who had vetoed a major civil-rights bill a few months earlier because it would encourage race-based hiring.

The newly nominated Alexander immediately saw that his views on the scholarship issue would swamp all his ideas about school reform at the upcoming Senate confirmation hearings unless the matter were sidelined for a while. So he bought some leeway by announcing that he would rewind the Department of Education's formal regulations back to a point before Williams's initial decree, and would undertake a six-month top-to-bottom review of this policy domain. Meanwhile the *status quo ante* governs university behavior, meaning that the U.S. Department of Education is not at present objecting to racially exclusive scholarships.

The Department has, on the other hand, raised doubts about excesses perpetrated in the name of "diversity" in the matter of college accreditation. Waiting on Alexander's desk when he entered his new office was the recommendation from a departmental advisory panel that he defer the customary renewal of official recognition of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools as a bona-fide accrediting body—a designation worth huge sums inasmuch as billions in federal aid flow only to "accredited" institutions and their students. Though Middle States and its ilk are private membership organizations, only when the Secretary "recognizes" them as providing "reliable authority" concerning "the quality of training offered" on member campuses do the federal spigots get turned on.

Accrediting groups have traditionally gone about the business of quality control by scrutinizing a college's resources, faculty qualifications, and academic programs. But Middle States recently added standards of racial and gender "equity and diversity" and, in widely publicized cases, applied these to the student-admissions and faculty-hiring patterns of Baruch College in New York and the composition of the (all-male) governing board of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. The Association presumably intends to apply its new standards to the hundreds of other institutions in its jurisdiction, and other accrediting groups have indicated their intention of following suit.

The issue here is whether accreditors, acting with government sanction and wielding over their members the large club of eligibility for federal aid, should function as "policemen of diversity" (in the apt phrase of Jim Sleeper of *Newsday*). Alexander's advisory panel did not reach a final decision on the matter, recommending merely a delay while more information was assembled and the issues reargued. The Education Department bureaucracy—and senior officials lingering from the Cavazos regime—urged the new Secretary to disregard that advice and give Middle States a clean bill of health. But Alexander agreed with the panel that this matter needed more thought.

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"It would surely be ironic," he later explained to a testy House subcommittee,

> if accrediting agencies were, in the name of diversity, to compel more of our institutions to look alike. . . . I want to make certain that I do not indirectly sanction coercive restrictions on institutional independence or on the academic or religious freedom of degree-granting institutions.

WE CANNOT yet be certain where the Education Department will finally come down with respect to race-conscious scholarships and accreditation practices. Across the mall, however, it is already certain what the bureaucrats in the Justice Department think about enforced diversity in higher education. They like it and want more of it.

Thus the same civil-rights division that is basing its voting-rights decisions on the ethnicity of putative election winners has tried to force the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) to admit women. This state-sponsored undergraduate institution has educated only men since its founding in 1839 and wishes to continue in that mode. But federal attorneys hauled VMI into court and insisted to the judge that single-sex education is bad, thereby invoking the first commandment of contemporary "political correctness," namely, that uniformity in pursuit of diversity is perfectly acceptable. Indeed, diversity thus defined is so important that institutions not voluntarily embracing it may be coerced into doing so. We are growing accustomed to this way of thinking in liberal circles, but it is still startling to see such arguments made with vigor by attorneys from a conservative Republican administration.

What was even more startling, however, was that Judge Jackson L. Kiser rejected the Justice Department's arguments about VMI. Instead, he followed the advice of scholars like Harvard's David Riesman who contend that single-sex education is beneficial for many college-age people and that the presence of such distinctive institutions enhances rather than diminishes the overall diversity of the higher-education enterprise. "VMI truly marches to the beat of a different drummer," Judge Kiser noted. Yet so intent is the Justice Department on enforcing diversity that departing Attorney General Richard Thornburgh announced that it would appeal Kiser's decision. (One wonders if he ever asked the President's opinion. A few weeks after Thornburgh's announcement, Bush said he found "some merit" in Detroit's plan to create several special public schools for young black male students.)

In addition to promoting mandatory diversity, the Justice Department is pursuing policies that fly in the face of the administration's new education-reform plans. "America 2000" calls upon colleges and universities to pay close heed to educational attainment, particularly as manifested in test results. Yet in a lengthy Supreme Court brief, the civil-rights division recently averred that Mississippi was contributing to racially segregated public higher education by relying too heavily on test scores as the basis for admission to college and university entrance.

Nor is the Justice Department the only federal agency at fault here. Though the Bush-Alexander school-reform strategy calls upon employers as well as college officials to use test results and other evidence of educational attainment in making hiring and promotion decisions, virtually everything that the federal government is up to in the field of employment discrimination is pressing in the opposite direction.

The reason is that conventional wisdom in this field holds that any use of evidence of educational attainment is apt to yield a "disparate impact"—i.e., white job candidates are likely to fare better than minorities. In a fully reformed education system such as the President envisions for the end of the decade, this effect would be sharply reduced, since virtually all youngsters would complete school having met rigorous standards of achievement. Until that day dawns, however, American society faces an authentic paradox.

Perhaps the surest way to nudge boys and girls to study harder and learn more, to prod schools into setting high norms and assisting students to meet them, and to focus parents on the import of their children's education is to raise the stakes by persuading employers, college-admissions offices, and others to weigh pupil achievement heavily in their decision-making. This will create palpable, real-world incentives—for children, parents, and educators—that are conspicuously lacking for most of them today.

Yet while we wait for that leverage to alter behavior in thousands of schools and millions of households—while those reforms are sinking in, those goals and standards being striven toward, and those incentives being felt throughout the land—there will be a period of continued, perhaps even heightened, "disparate impact" during which diplomas, test scores, and other such evidence of attainment are unequally distributed by race (as well as by age, parental education, socioeconomic status, and other gauges). And that, of course, is why the old-line civil-rights crowd wants to forbid the use of all such evidence in important decisions bearing on people's lives. For even though black and Hispanic Americans are among the people most likely to benefit from education reform in the long run, they are also among the groups most apt to be inconvenienced in the short run.

THIS problem was first spotted by Evan J. Kemp, Jr., chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (the post held by Clarence Thomas during most of the 1980's). Soon after "America 2000" was unveiled,

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he advised the White House that its ambitious school-reform strategy would be undercut if part of the government was urging employers to emphasize educational achievement while other branches of the same government were simultaneously warning the same employers not to do anything of the sort.

The debate was squarely joined in early summer when Senator John Danforth of Missouri, a Republican, tried to broker a civil-rights compromise, crafting job-discrimination provisions that he thought would split the difference on the issue of quotas. To his surprise, this was no longer the only vexing issue associated with the bill.

Kemp pointed out to the White House chief of staff, John Sununu, that Danforth's phrasing of crucial statutory language would make it "extremely difficult for employers to show that use of educational credentials and objective measures of academic achievement is legally defensible." Alexander said much the same thing in a letter to Senator Orrin Hatch: "I have grave doubts about the wisdom of legislation that would threaten employers with civil liability if they asked prospective employees for a high-school transcript or a diploma."

Bush invoked this reasoning on July 28 when he rejected the Danforth compromise. The angry Senator sputtered about creating a situation in which "a 50-year-old person who never happened to get a high-school diploma can't get a job as a janitor," and the New York *Times* editorially dismissed the President's explanation as a "new pretext" for opposing civil rights. But Alexander, who found himself suddenly cast in the role of civil-rights point man for the administration, responded that Danforth's bill "sends a message that says, 'Your diploma doesn't count when you go to get a job,' and that's exactly the wrong message."

All but lost in the press coverage, however, was the irony, not to say hypocrisy, of the administration's *own* alternative civil-rights bill. For this bill, it turns out, would make it only slightly less dangerous for employers to demand education credentials in hiring and promotion. Moreover, much like the Democratic and Danforth bills, the administration's would encourage employers to rely on quota-like hiring and promotion practices in order to avoid expensive lawsuits that they would probably lose. Indeed, the three rival proposals differ chiefly in the degree of such danger and of such encouragement that they supply.

Much of this debate hinges on nuances of phrasing and forecasting that few people can fathom in detail—and that is precisely what makes the underlying principles so important. The idea of rewarding those who study hard is easily understood, as is the notion of denying such rewards to those who drop out or slack off while in school. People can also grasp the fundamental distinction between hiring according to group membership and selecting employees on the basis of individual merit. Bush and his team have been pressing those arguments in plain enough language. But the problem is that the administration's bill is, to put it gently, less than fully faithful to the principles the administration espouses. Alas for clarity of understanding, it has not been in the interest of either the administration or its sparring partners on Capitol Hill to point this out.

WHILE these legislative and political wars over the idea of quotas are being waged, so to speak, in the air, the reality of quotas, pushed by a dogged bureaucracy, creeps inexorably across the earth below. And no sector of the bureaucracy is more dogged in this than the Department of Labor.

This agency enters the field from two directions: as policeman of affirmative action among federal contractors, and as proprietor of the U.S. Employment Service, which works with state and local agencies to match people with jobs.

In the former role, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) deploys more than 500 enforcers to monitor the employment practices of tens of thousands of corporations and other institutions that do business with the government. Virtually all of them are required to have affirmative-action plans containing "goals and timetables" designed to "correct any identifiable deficiencies," these to be determined by an analysis of "underutilization" of women and minorities in the employer's workforce. Though the regulations assert that "goals may not be rigid and inflexible quotas," they also stipulate that "goals should be specific for planned results, with timetables for completion." (Civil-rights doublespeak, it will be seen, is not confined to language crafted by Congress.)

OFCCP has been a busy office. In fiscal 1990 it conducted some 6,000 "compliance reviews"—and found more than three-quarters of those contractors to be in violation of its regulations. This led to the signing of 2,855 "conciliation agreements" between OFCCP and contractors, and to 1,700 other firms issuing letters proclaiming their intent to comply with government demands. Only 40 refused. Few can afford to, since they speedily face the loss of all federal business.

Especially notable about this enforcement enterprise is that it has *no statutory basis whatsoever.* Its origins are an executive order signed by Lyndon Johnson and maintained (and revised) by every administration since. When former Attorney General Edwin Meese proposed to the Reagan cabinet that the goals and timetables be made voluntary, Herman Belz recounts in *Equality Transformed,* "Secretary of Labor William Brock . . . called revision of the executive order 'politically crazy.' . . ." Opinion within the administration remained sharply divided. White House chief of staff Donald Regan refused to place the

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matter before the President. In time Meese backed off. And there matters stand today. As Daniel Seligman of *Fortune* points out, "Unlike the scenarios being debated in Congress, where the pressure for quotas would come from litigation, this is a deal wherein the government itself supplies the pressure."

Over at the U.S. Employment Service, something even more nefarious has been under way for a decade. Technically called "within-group score conversion," it has lately become better known as "race-norming" and involves the reporting of jobseekers' results on the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB).

The GATB—the primary placement test used by the Employment Service, its state and local partners, and sundry job programs operated under government auspices—is a fairly good predictor of how well people will perform in various jobs. It appraises such qualities as learning ability, manual dexterity, spatial perception, and verbal and mathematical prowess. The problem, once again, is that while the GATB measures individual achievement, blacks and Hispanics today generally do less well on it than whites. Hence if these results are reported honestly, employers hiring top scorers will not end up with a proportionate number of black and Hispanic workers.

The Labor Department's way of responding to this situation has been to monkey with the test scores. The Employment Service began to refer job applicants on the basis of GATB results reported only in relation to their own racial or ethnic groups. Thus "within-group score conversion" tables were developed such that if a black, a Hispanic, and a white each scored 300 on GATB, and each was seeking work as a machinist, the Employment Service would report to the employer that the black candidate had scored at the 79th percentile, the Hispanic at the 62nd, and the white at the 39th percentile.

Once exposed to public view, this practice was hard to defend, and it became even more awkward for the Bush administration while the new civil-rights legislation was being debated. The issue also became partisan. When Republican Congressman Henry Hyde asked the House Judiciary Committee to ban the adjustment of test scores, he was defeated on a straight party-line vote. He later prevailed on the House floor, but that chamber, while outlawing race-norming, also banned the use in employment selection of all tests that do not "fairly predict . . . , without regard to the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin of such test takers, the ability of such test takers to perform the job"—a provision that is virtually certain to result in the elimination of *all* use of test results by employers.

Since there has been no clear decision by the President to do away with the obnoxious practice of race-norming, the likely outcome is that the employment tests themselves will indeed be shelved, either through unilateral action of the executive branch or by congressional edict.

Incidentally, quotas and "within-group score conversion" have not been confined to the private sector. In fact, what used to be a reasonably solid (sometimes ossified) commitment to the merit system in government employment has in recent years been turning into a *de-facto* quota system. Donald Devine, former director of the Office of Personnel Management, recently recounted how "the departing Carter Justice Department had signed a sweetheart 'consent decree' that had the Wonderland effect of requiring us to devise an exam that would hire the same proportions of blacks and Hispanics as took the exam."

Even the once-elite precincts of Foggy Bottom have been affected. For almost a quarter-century now, the State Department has been reworking its Foreign Service exam so that more women and minorities will clear that hurdle. Each such endeavor, predictably, has created its own fresh problems. Eliminating the foreign-language aptitude test so as to benefit minorities made the situation worse for women, who typically did well on that part of the exam. Giving greater weight to the English portion, in order to boost women's total scores, turned out to be bad for minority candidates. Lawsuits were filed. In time, the Department created a "near-pass" category through which it could induct into the Foreign Service women and minorities whose scores were below the cut-off for white males.

Even this did not do the trick in the eyes of Judge Patricia Wald who, in 1987, instructed the agency to devise procedures whereby women would move through the ranks of the Foreign Service in equal proportions to men. Another judge told the Department to scrap two more parts of the exam and consider only the "English Expression" scores. In order to ensure satisfactory outcomes, the agency has recently replaced its "near-pass" category with a whole new approach to exam-scoring. Much like Labor's GATB, but with respect to gender rather than race, State now uses separate "norms" for reporting scores. But it still tests only the "English Expression" of jobseekers. General knowledge, foreign-language aptitude, and the portions of the old exam designed to determine which specialty within the Foreign Service a person might be best suited to—none of these is now appraised.

In matters of employment, there is at least a struggle between the principle of opportunities for meritorious individuals and the principle of guaranteed outcomes for members of designated groups. When one turns to the domain of government contracts, however, there is scant evidence of any resistance at all to the

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latter approach, which takes the form in this area of "set-asides"—that is, contracts specifically reserved for businesses owned by people "determined to be socially and economically disadvantaged."

The surest way for the owner of a business to establish eligibility for the "8-A" program of the Small Business Administration (SBA), for example, is to be a member of any of five "designated groups." Besides blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans, two different categories of Asian-Americans are also eligible. People in any of those categories—including physicians from Bombay and businessmen from Hong Kong—are automatically deemed to be "socially disadvantaged." People not fitting the five ethnic categories may also qualify if they demonstrate their disadvantage to program officials by answering questions that invite them to present a litany of examples of how they have been victimized by American society: "Have you because of your cultural, ethnic, or social background been subjected to chronic substantial discrimination. . . . ? If so, explain fully. . . . Have you experienced low-income status because of apparent discriminatory practice?" And so on and on and on.

Much like university administrators pursuing "political correctness" by inviting campus factions to seek the moral and material advantages that come with victim status, the federal government here is once again fostering the tribalization of America.

For all its political astuteness and lofty approval ratings, the Bush administration may not have figured out that the American public would welcome vigorous, principled leadership on this increasingly bitter front. Separatism, tribalism, victimism, and preferentialism have passed most people's level of endurance. The White House's own success with the issue of quotas is evidence of this, as is the air of mockery and loathing with which mainstream magazines now discuss "political correctness" on campus.

True, the President has delivered an excellent speech on the dangers of PC. But his team has yet to understand fully that PC is another branch of the same tree from which quotas grow and that it also sprouts race-norming, enforced diversity, the cult of being oppressed, and compensatory set-asides. Planted by the makers of the second civil-rights agenda—the one that emphasizes groups and outcomes rather than individuals and opportunities—this tree has by now grown so large that its shadow darkens huge patches of our national life. George Bush has shown some inclination, if not to take an axe to its trunk, then at least to trim the branches. But with a few honorable exceptions, the government he heads continues to fertilize and water the roots.

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How Not to Aid Eastern Europe

Nicholas N. Eberstadt

As the West's long battle with Soviet Communism draws to a close, practical men in America and elsewhere ponder a novel question: how to bring forth a lawful, prosperous, and secure order from the rubble of the former Soviet Union. For many statesmen, diplomats, and captains of industry, the answer is already clear: we should rely upon foreign-aid policies, skillfully designed and massively financed. Through existing agencies or new ones, it is argued, such transfers will speed the transition from Communism to market democracies for hundreds of millions of people.

Yet the ongoing dramas in Moscow, and the attention these have commanded, have obscured the fact that America and other Western states are *already* experimenting with a series of aid programs for ex-Communist countries. The recipients in question are the societies of Central and Eastern Europe. The population of those five former members of the Warsaw pact—Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria—totals nearly 100 million (and will be larger still if Yugoslavia and Albania are added to their ranks), and while the sums involved are not historic, neither are they trifling. The United States, for example, has already authorized over $1.5 billion in grants for Eastern Europe and has guaranteed several times that amount in subsidized loans through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the new European Bank.

There is every indication that the new U.S. programs for the ex-Communist countries will build upon the tradition and experience of American aid programs in other parts of the world. Thus, in Poland the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is helping with "two model cooperative [housing] developments of 100 units total"; Bulgaria is receiving 300,000 metric tons of surplus feed grain for its livestock; and previously pro-natalist Romania is now the beneficiary of a "priority program" in the field of family planning. In light of these continuities, it may be appropriate not only to consider the prospects for aid for these post-Communist societies, but to reflect more generally on the performance of American "development assistance" to date.

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I

We can begin with a simple thought experiment. What would we have expected the economies, societies, and polities of Eastern Europe to look like in 1990 if those five countries had been recipients of American development assistance over the previous two decades?

Like all such experiments, this one is necessarily speculative. But we can pursue it by comparing various characteristics of the countries of Eastern Europe immediately after their revolutions of 1989 with those of the dozens of African, Asian, and Latin American countries that did in fact enjoy steady flows of bilateral American development assistance during the 1970's and 1980's.

One strikingly unhealthy characteristic of the East European states is the inability to manage external debt. Over the course of the 1980's, the governments of Poland and Romania (and also Yugoslavia) not only failed to repay their international creditors on the schedules to which they were contractually committed, but sought and obtained debt-relief agreements from them. At the time of its liquidation, the international finances of Hungary's Communist government had also become precarious. After the collapse of Communism in the German Democratic Republic, previously secret documents showed that the state's external hard-currency debts were nearly twice as great as officially acknowledged. And a few months after the demise of the Zhivkov regime, Bulgaria suspended its repayments of both interest and principal to its hard-currency creditors.

During the 1980's, such debt crises were also characteristic of the states that had been long-term recipients of bilateral American development assistance. During that decade alone, by the World Bank's count, 45 of the 74 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean which were receiving direct economic assistance from

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USAID sought and obtained debt-relief agreements.

Compounding the financial difficulties of Eastern Europe's Communist states was their determination to maintain nonconvertible currencies which would restrict the role of international trade in the local economy. This meant that before 1989, for all practical purposes, the currencies of Eastern Europe were nearly worthless in the open market.

Such nonconvertibility, or limited convertibility, is also characteristic of the currencies minted by the states that have been receiving economic assistance from the United States over the past two decades. According to the IMF, only ten of the more than 70 countries today receiving bilateral economic assistance from the United States are deemed to have "independently floating" (that is, spontaneously convertible) currencies—and there are reasons to believe this may be a generous estimate.

In the late 1980's, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe bore the disfiguring scars of decades of socialist planning. The structures of their economies had been severely deformed. Their central governments, which had arrogated utterly dominant roles for themselves within the local economy, had amassed vast networks of state-owned enterprises. Without regard to consumers, these governments had directed forced-pace transitions out of agriculture and into state-owned heavy industries. They depressed private consumption and diverted funds into state investment, not on the basis of economic calculation but as a matter of political principle.

Parallel distortions are just as evident in the economies of long-term recipients of American aid. For example, the ratio of central-government spending to national output in Egypt—the principal U.S. aid recipient in Africa—was about the same as in Poland or Romania during the 1980's. The Comoro Islands, Jamaica, Jordan, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are some other long-term recipients whose ratios of central spending to output seem roughly to match Poland's and Romania's. By the same token, the war against agriculture, and against the consumer, looks to have been taken as far in some recipient countries as in Soviet-occupied Europe, or even farther. By the World Bank's reckoning, the share of agriculture in the economies of Zimbabwe, Jamaica, Peru, and Jordan was lower in the 1980's than in Hungary. And such long-term recipients as the People's Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Ivory Coast have evidently managed to achieve ratios of private consumption to national product nearly as low as in Jaruzelski's Poland.

For obvious reasons, the Communist governments of Central and Eastern Europe did not attract significant quantities of foreign capital for direct private investment during the 1980's. Such inflows were also negligible for long-term recipients of American development assistance during those years. This systemic inability to attract voluntary investment from abroad speaks to the business climate of the countries in question. The factors affecting business climate, difficult to quantify, include such things as the state of civil order, the extent to which law presides, and the degree of hostility toward the rights of the individual (including the right to property)—in short, the quality of the civil and political liberties that the local population may be said to enjoy. In many recipient states, as in the Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, that quality was, to say the least, low.

One can, of course, identify a number of characteristic differences between the policies and practices of today's East European states and the group of states involved in long-term participation in U.S. development programs. But in many important areas, what seems most striking is precisely the *lack* of distinct differences.

Our thought experiment thus points to a fundamental question. If the conditions of the present states of Eastern Europe cannot be distinguished by such meaningful economic and political criteria from those of governments that have been obtaining American funds and development advice these last few decades, why should U.S. aid be expected to help Eastern Europe evolve *away* from its current characteristics—much less in the direction of self-sustaining economic growth or open, liberal polities?

II

The fact is that American development-assistance policies, for many years, have been more likely to lead a prospective beneficiary toward an Eastern Europe-style economic morass than to help it escape from one toward economic health and self-sufficiency. To understand why this should be so, we need a quick glance at the past.

In its early years, American development aid (or "technical assistance," as it was called at the time) was extended to governments in the free world to help them participate more fully in the liberal international economic order that had been created after World War II. To American policy-makers, the primacy of private and commercial effort was self-evident. So too, in their minds, was the link between government policies and local prospects for material advance.

American development-assistance programs were tested by many minor challenges in the 1950's and 1960's, but they were shaken to their foundations by the Vietnam war. A confusion between the political and economic objectives of foreign aid, already evident in the discussions that surrounded USAID's founding in 1961, was permanently impressed upon the agency by the Johnson administration's decision to harness it to the war-winning effort. The programs that emerged in the

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field in response to these pressures—refugee relief, relocation projects, "pacification" programs, and the like—were not, in fact, meant to be judged by economic criteria. Severing the link between the living standards of local populations and the productive capacities of their economies had previously been regarded as a matter of enormous practical and moral hazard; during the Vietnam war, U.S. aid programs embraced the principle of such a separation, and sought to enforce it widely in practice.

Ironically, the new approach was soon globalized by American *critics* of the war. By the early 1970's, the U.S. foreign-aid budget was the battlefield for a sort of guerrilla action against the President by a Congress discontented with the course and conduct of his Southeast Asian policy. After repeated failures to obtain its requested appropriations, the Nixon administration agreed to a congressional rewriting of the aid mandate in 1973. This was the so-called "New Directions" legislation, which remains in force today.

The "New Directions" language instructed USAID to focus its attention directly on the poorest of the poor: not only to reach them, but to "satisfy their basic needs and [enable them to] lead lives of decency, dignity, and hope." This "Basic Human Needs Mandate," as it came to be known, not only authorized but seemingly required development policy to involve itself in the uplifting of local living standards through direct provision of goods and services—much as had been done in Vietnam. Though theoretical arguments were advanced to explain the contributions such activities would make toward the goal of self-sustaining development, the practical result was to mandate not development but long-term relief programs. Significantly, the "New Directions" legislation did not require, or even urge, American agencies to monitor the impact of recipient governments' policies and practices on the economies they supervised.

With the "lessons of Vietnam" thus perversely codified into its new operating procedures, American development-aid programs, originally based on the premise of strict conditionality, became a vehicle for unconditional resource transfers. With the decline in conditionality, "graduations" out of the U.S. aid program also came to a virtual end—despite the fact that graduation, by its very nature, is one of the criteria by which the success of policies designed to promote self-sustaining economic development can be measured. In 1989, an unusually frank report by USAID acknowledged this and other problems:

> Somewhere between 1949 and the present, the original concept of development assistance as a transitional means of helping developing countries "meet their own needs" has been lost. . . . All too often, dependency seems to have won out over development. . . . Only a handful of countries that started receiving U.S. assistance in the 1950's and 1960's has ever graduated from dependent status. . . . Where development has worked, and is working, the key has been economic growth. And this is largely the result of individual nations making the right policy choices. . . .

What about the role of American aid in fostering political liberalization in recipient countries? Long-term receipt of American development assistance has certainly not *prevented* a transition toward a more open and participatory political order, as happened in much of Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1980's. Yet similar transitions took place in Latin countries that did not enjoy bilateral American economic-aid programs at the time. Moreover, many long-term recipients in other regions during the same decade did not undergo liberalization. So the record in this regard is equivocal at best.

In sum, an East European government seeking assistance from America's existing aid apparatus would be engaged in a singular act of faith, for there is little in the record to suggest that these programs contribute to economic liberalization or development, while there is considerable evidence to the contrary.

III

Is, then, the story of America's postwar international economic policy one of unremitting failure? Quite the contrary: the framework for trade and finance that the United States helped to fashion in the 1940's is surely one of the more extraordinary successes in the history of international relations; indeed, it is one of the few whose accomplishments may have exceeded the hopes of its creators.

Moreover, specific American interventions are widely thought to have succeeded as well. For example, American assistance is commonly considered instrumental to the postwar recoveries and expansions of Western Europe and Japan, and later to the dynamic growth of such newly industrializing economies as Taiwan and South Korea. Advocates of aid initiatives for Eastern Europe, indeed, sometimes make their case by broad analogy with these earlier experiences. Are they right to do so?

Western Europe

Like the words "democracy" and "freedom," "Marshall Plan" is a phrase that evokes a warm and favorable response. But while the Plan is often invoked, its actual objectives, applications, and results suffer from a strange neglect.

As its official name—the European Recovery Program (ERP)—reminds us, the Marshall Plan's aim was to *restore* devastated economies. That is,

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the stated objective was to help its West European recipients reattain their prewar levels of output. Although two decades of brisk and virtually uninterrupted economic expansion came on the heels of the Plan, the ERP itself was not designed to foment self-sustained growth. Quite simply, it was not a program for development.

Specific aspects of the Marshall Plan, moreover, raise questions about its actual contribution to the recovery.

Under Nazi occupation, the vanquished economies of Europe had been brought under a comprehensive system of controls, through which they were to be harnessed to the German war effort. After World War II, some of these controls stayed in place over most of the liberated economies. Moreover, the ERP actually *required* recipient states to engage in economic planning in order to obtain aid. Needless to say, this approach encouraged statist impulses on the part of beneficiary governments. In more than one country Marshall aid was used to postpone rather than hasten economic adjustments or "privatizations"; occasionally, as in Italy, there actually emerged the spectacle of a government struggling—against the wishes of its ERP financiers—to pursue a liberal economic program.

There was another problem. In its first two years, the Marshall Plan established a complex system of bilateral drawing rights among European recipients of aid. The result of this "Little Marshall Plan" was to subsidize governments with overvalued currencies and large trade deficits and to penalize governments that attempted to maintain discipline in their accounts. Ludwig Erhard, West Germany's Minister for Economic Affairs from 1949 to 1963, once estimated that Belgium lost four-fifths of its dollar aid in the first years of the Marshall Plan due to these perverse incentives.

In recent years scholars approaching the Marshall Plan from widely divergent perspectives have drawn a similar conclusion: the ERP's contributions to European recovery may have been more complex and less dramatic than is commonly assumed. This is not to say that American aid was inconsequential to Western Europe's economic recovery and subsequent boom. In fact the United States played an important and even decisive role; but precisely how it did so is not always appreciated.

Two interventions require special mention. The first was the American security guarantee that was provided to Western Europe initially through the informal Pax Americana of 1945 to 1949, and thereafter through the formal obligations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). America's political and military commitment to the continental regimes imparted to these regimes a quality they would otherwise have manifestly lacked: credibility. That credibility conduced to stability, and it promoted business confidence in these localities, not only in the eyes of the domestic populace, but in the eyes of foreign investors as well.

Second, the Marshall Plan gave a belated push to European integration—that is, to economic liberalization. Alongside the founding of NATO came the organization of the European Payments Union (EPU). The EPU laid the basis for currency convertibility among its members (although full convertibility was only to come later). In so doing, it also generated competitive pressures for the reduction of trade barriers and tariffs. In retrospect, the EPU can be seen as having paved the way for the specialization that helped to propel Western Europe's postwar economic advance. But even at the time, contemporary observers counted the EPU as one of the Marshall Plan's most important accomplishments—no less important, perhaps, in that it helped to undo some of the work that the Plan itself had originally financed.

Japan

THE U.S. occupation of Japan—"Japan's American interlude," as one scholar has described it—lasted from 1945 until April 1952. Accustomed as we have become to Japanese prosperity, it may be difficult to remember just how hard-pressed the country was during those years. At the end of the occupation, economic conditions seemed favorable only in comparison to the catastrophic year following the unconditional surrender. In 1951, industrial output was still significantly below its 1937 levels. Foreign trade did not reattain its prewar volume until the mid-1950's—well after the occupation was concluded. By almost any economic measure, Japan's postwar recovery was slower than Western Europe's.

Between mid-1945 and mid-1950, the United States extended considerable financial assistance to Japan. Under the program of Government and Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA), total transfers during that period exceeded $1.8 billion (roughly $7-8 billion at today's prices). None of this aid, however, was earmarked for development, and only a portion of it was allocated to the tasks of reconstruction. As the "R" in GARIOA indicates, much of the money went to relief, through direct handouts or by provision of supplies to make-work industries. On this regimen of relief, recuperation was halting: as late as 1949, the official index of manufacturing activity was at barely half its 1937 level.

Relief-oriented aid was only part of the economy's problem. Allied officials were, for several years, ambivalent about the prospect of a Japanese economic recovery. They concentrated instead on imposing a radical political and social transformation upon the archipelago. It required a number of regional events, including the collapse of the Nationalist government in China and the

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Communist surprise attack in Korea, to impress policy-makers in Washington with the importance of Japanese recovery.

In itself, the determination that the occupiers would not postively obstruct economic restoration was of course significant. As for interventions encouraging economic growth, the inadvertent played a role alongside the deliberate. The Korean war, for example, was a great windfall for the Japanese economy, resulting in a regional trade boom and occasioning major U.S. infusions into the domestic economy. America's subsequent designation of Japan as the principal forward base in its Asian security system not only sparked business confidence in the country, but brought very tangible economic benefits as well. In the five years after the outbreak of the Korean war, U.S. "special-procurement" expenditures in Japan totaled $4 billion. Other U.S. military activities had a further impact on the domestic economy.

America's less accidental contribution came through what the scholar Jerome B. Cohen once called our "sponsorship" of Japan. In his recounting:

> After the signing of the peace treaty [between Japan and its erstwhile enemies] in 1952, the United States government sponsored Japan's reentry into world trade relationships, concluding reciprocal trade agreements with Japan, securing admission to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and using its own tariff concessions to other nations to secure favorable treatment for Japan. United States firms concluded a large number of technical-assistance contracts with Japanese companies which enabled them to obtain the latest know-how, patents, copyrights, and machinery and equipment, as well as training for their technicians. The U.S. International Cooperation Agency [the precursor to AID] established a Productivity Center in Japan to help Japanese industries become more efficient and competitive. . . .

In short, the United States made it easier for Japan to undertake the outward-looking economic policy that its leaders already clearly wished to pursue.

Any account of the "American interlude" in Japan that neglects the political and social revolutions wrought by the occupiers would be critically incomplete. Indeed, many people in both Japan and the United States would argue that the occupation's principal accomplishment was to prepare the country for liberal democracy.

The American-written constitution that was presented to a defeated Japanese nation is still in force today. Its very authorship speaks broadly to the exceptional circumstances under which Japan's political and social transition from dictatorship was executed. If, today, there is a debate among Western students of Japan about the degree to which the country qualifies as an open society or a liberal order, that debate only serves to remind us of the limits to be expected of policies aimed at promoting democratization—even under the most favorable auspices imaginable.

Korea and Taiwan

UNLIKE Japan and Western Europe, Taiwan and Korea received significant amounts of American assistance expressly for the purposes of development. Between 1949 and 1961 alone, AID's predecessor organizations transferred over $1.2 billion to Taiwan and over $2 billion to Korea (sums whose totals would be much higher if adjusted to their purchasing power in today's dollars). Thereafter, a remarkable economic boom ensued—and continued—in both countries. Between the early 1960's and the late 1980's, according to official statistics, real per-capita output increased by a factor of over six in South Korea, and by still more in Taiwan. In their broad outlines, the experiences of these two countries would seem to present the strongest case for the positive potential of development assistance.

The case looks somewhat different, however, when it is examined more closely. During the period of maximum inflows, for example, South Korea's economic growth was unexceptional. In 1953-55 and 1960-62, by one estimate, the South Korean GNP rose by 4 percent a year; per-capita growth would have been less than 1.5 percent a year by that reckoning.

The phenomenon of indifferent growth in the face of massive inflows of aid was, inescapably, related to official policies. The Rhee government may have had its virtues, but it created a distorted and politicized economic environment that discouraged savings, investment, and trade, among other things. Students of the Korean economy have even described the Rhee policies as "aid-maximizing," in the sense that the South Korean government seemed willing to imperil its own economy to prove the need for the foreign bequests it wished to obtain.

Rapid economic growth commenced in South Korea only in the 1960's, after the Park regime embraced an export-oriented policy. The factors influencing that decision were diverse, but U.S. aid also figured in the shift, albeit in a negative way: in late 1962, American officials discreetly informed their Korean counterparts that U.S. economic aid—which then accounted for as much as half of the South Korean government's official revenues—would be cut back sharply in the coming years, and eventually curtailed. This prospect could not but have concentrated the mind wonderfully.

In Taiwan, circumstances were not as extreme, but the patterns were similar. Per-capita economic growth there was probably more rapid than in Korea between 1953 and 1962, and accelerated sharply after 1962. Just as in Korea, if at a somewhat earlier date, the Taiwanese government had

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been informed that American economic aid would be shut off; just as in Korea, the government subsequently embraced an outward-looking economic policy.

One should not conclude that American aid *per se* was extraneous to the progress of these two highly successful economies. Both countries faced very real military threats from Communist rivals; the survival of neither Taiwan nor South Korea was a foregone conclusion. The American security commitment to both countries figured incalculably in their development, and American military aid also played a major role in their domestic economies. For both Korea and Taiwan, this political and military support had the effect of preserving the *possibility* of rapid economic growth, even as that growth itself seems to have been brought about in some measure by the systematic reduction of development-assistance funding.

IV

Reviewed as a group, then, the success stories of U.S. economic assistance do not seem to offer any immediate or obvious encouragement to the new initiatives now being contemplated for Eastern Europe. Few of the components that figured importantly in these earlier successes are likely to be replicable today. Other components are no longer necessary to replicate, since they already exist.

For example, although the several states of Eastern Europe may or may not ultimately choose to join the NATO alliance, they are unlikely to require the sorts of security guarantees and military aid that Western Europe, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea variously enjoyed. It is also hard to imagine that these countries, long subjugated to a Soviet-style dictatorship, would now voluntarily invite the United States or other governments to exercise even temporary mastery over their arrangements to fashion new constitutional or civil orders. Finally, the international trade and finance markets so vitally important to the earlier success stories are already in place for East European countries to avail themselves of.

What about conditions in Eastern Europe itself? First and foremost, it may be misleading to think of the region as a region. "Eastern Europe" was defined, indeed created, by Soviet occupation. With the passing of that occupation, many of the differences that have historically characterized the area are again more easily perceived. The populations differ by language, religion, cultural heritage—even by alphabet. They also differ in their political and legal traditions. There is no reason to expect that those differences, which were not erased under the common experience of occupation, will disappear in the near future.

Second, political developments vary signficantly from one state to the next. In Prague, the current Minister of Finance is an avowed disciple of Milton Friedman; in Romania, by contrast, both polity and personnel mark a continuity between the old regime and the new. As one observer has commented, "the age of uniformity is over." This is true of prospects for political liberalization as well as of prospects for economic development.

Third, conditions are still evolving, and retain at least a degree of fluidity. The volatility of the landscape at the moment not only makes it less useful to focus on current events (such as proposed or pending measures for policy reform), but also limits the ability to generalize about problems and opportunities.

Yet the diversity and fluidity of conditions in Eastern Europe today are in a sense also a boon to analysis, for they serve to emphasize two problems that are central to these societies' prospects. Both derive from the region's Soviet "interlude."

The first and arguably most important obstacle to economic and political development is the pervasive institutional maladaptation wrought by Soviet rule. Such maladjustment, unfortunately, goes beyond even the irrational process of central economic planning and the cumbersome, expensive system of socialist management. For in the exercise of Communist power, the socialist rulers of Eastern Europe spent more than four decades destroying the institutional framework of a civil order in these countries. It was not only the framework of property rights, and individual rights, that came under assault, but the very rule of law itself.

The political implications of this are clear enough. Scarcely less important, though, are its economic implications. Economic historians are in general agreement that the rise of the Western world was directly and inextricably linked to the new institutional arrangements it developed, and perhaps none of those arrangements was more important than the framework of legal protections for individuals that included the right of enforceable private contracts. The populations of Eastern Europe have been separated from that framework for more than four decades. The majority have no memory of firsthand exposure to it, to say nothing of personal familiarity.

This suggests that the institutional obstacles to Eastern Europe's development are much greater than would seem to be implied by today's intense discussions about, and proposals for, privatization of state-owned enterprises. To be sure, disendowing the states of the assets they have taken for themselves will be an immense task. Over the course of Margaret Thatcher's eleven-year tenure as Prime Minister, the British government succeeded in transferring something less than 5 percent of the country's output from government ownership back to private hands; in Eastern Europe, the privatizations now contemplated are greater by far. These are

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ambitious undertakings. But how much more ambitious by comparison will be the task of establishing a permanent, legitimate arrangement for the protection of individual rights and the enforcement of private contracts.

Institutional maladjustment is not the only enormous obstacle to development in Eastern Europe. Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and East Germany are also beset by what might be described as a crisis of human capital. Perhaps the most telling evidence of that crisis has been the long-term deterioration of health conditions in both the USSR and its former satellites. The deterioration is represented very clearly in the local patterns of mortality. Between the mid-1960's and the mid-1980's, age-standardized death rates in the USSR and Soviet-occupied Europe actually rose. No other region of the world reported such a trend, and, in fact, no other industrial country has *ever* experienced such a general and long-term peacetime decline in public health. By the late 1980's, Eastern Europe's *lowest* death rates (East Germany) were substantially higher than Western Europe's *highest* ones (Ireland), and also higher than those reported for such Latin American societies as Argentina, Chile, and even Mexico.

One need not posit a tight, mechanistic relationship between levels of health and levels of output to appreciate the significance of these facts. By its very nature, rising mortality imposes constraints upon the productive capacities of the societies affected. Moreover, because rising mortality trends are so anomalous in the modern era, they suggest the possibility that other, more poorly measured aspects of human capital may also have been affected.

Can American development assistance specifically assist in relieving these obstacles to development in Eastern Europe? It is very difficult to imagine how. AID has no comparative advantage in helping to build the foundations of a civil order. Nor was it designed for helping to arrest mortality increases in industrial societies, or even for contributing to the preservation and augmentation of human capital in such places.

What is true of AID's limitations applies more generally to the entire field of development policy. A conventionally trained development economist may offer advice to a policy-maker on how to get prices right, or achieve balances in the macroeconomy, or devise realistic measures for stabilization. There is merit in such activities, but for societies that were forced to march down the perverted path of Soviet-style socialism, they are hardly central to the problems at hand.

OVERCOMING the legacy of the immediate past is likely to require bold and fundamental departures from existing practices and arrangements in each of the countries of Eastern Europe. Respected local voices—Vaclav Klaus in Czechoslovakia, Janos Kornai in Hungary, Jan Winiecki in Poland, Ognian Pishev in Bulgaria, and many others—recognize as much, and urge immediate and decisive action. Such voices, indeed, offer the one cheering note in an otherwise thoroughly discouraging picture, for a number of the officials who will be receiving our development assistance may turn out to be wiser and braver than those dispensing it. Thus, in an address to a September 1990 meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Vaclav Klaus announced, "We know that there have been cases where major financial assistance caused the deceleration, not the acceleration, of the necessary systematic changes that we consider of the utmost importance." Though these were simple words, they were telling—for the highest officials at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been unable to utter them publicly.

To the contrary, after tens of billions of dollars wasted in loans for "policy reform" over the past decade, Western development-assistance policymakers are once again in the midst of a debate about the proper "sequencing" of the "reforms" they envision. In its recent (1990) recommendations to Poland, the World Bank urged the Polish government against undue speed in privatization:

> In recognition . . . of the fact that immediate privatization may not be advisable and/or feasible, the government needs to explore alternative forms of manager/ownership whose key objective would be to introduce greater competition and efficiency in resource use.

It spoke in favor of a similar caution toward capital markets:

> It would be important to lay the groundwork for a future capital market . . . so that . . . [it] could start functioning when price and other adjustments allow for an improved valuation of capital stock.

It advised against a " 'one-shot' approach [in which] all major adjustment measures would be implemented rapidly," warning that "the costs of the approach need to be carefully considered." Instead, it advocated as "most promising" a "third, intermediate approach" consisting of a "vigorous stabilization program complemented by an adjustment program phased over two to three years," and presumably by privatizations at some later date. The report did, however, conclude that its proposed "measures need to be supported by substantial foreign assistance"; indeed, it implies that Poland should be a recipient of various forms of Western financial aid on into the 21st century.

In the face of such rarefied and even surreal deliberations, it is a relief to turn to the wisdom which seems so obvious to East European exponents of fast, radical transformation; namely, that the longer the transition to an independent, liberal order is delayed, the lower the ultimate chances of its success.

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Our Debt to I.B. Singer

Joseph Epstein

I MET the late Isaac Bashevis Singer only once, briefly but unforgettably, in 1963. It was in Manhattan, at the apartment of one of his early translators. He was then fifty-nine, no kid, but only just coming into his own in a serious way as a writer now frequently published in English. I had read everything of his I could find. I admired him without qualification—thought him the possessor of a powerful artistic talent, a man touched by magic and thus greatly blessed and to be revered. Captivating on the page, he was not disappointing in person.

Twelve or fourteen people were in the apartment that evening—literary intellectuals, academics, editors. Singer did most of the talking, not in any unpleasant or pushing way but instead by general agreement. He was obviously more distinguished than anyone else in the room, had lived a more interesting life, had more to report. He told, as no doubt he would subsequently retell hundreds of times, about the mildly comic situation of being, then in his late fifties, still the youngest contributor to the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward*; he talked a bit about Jewish intellectual and literary life in Warsaw; I recall his saying that he had translated Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* into Yiddish. He reported that he did not read the New York *Times* but instead preferred the *Daily News*, which, with its extensive coverage of murders, kidnappings, rapes, divorces, and scandals, was so much richer fare for a novelist. All this was set out in a calm, slightly creaking voice, heavily accented, without any show of unseemly pleasure at being the center of attention.

One of the things Singer happened to mention that evening was the loss of his parakeet. A rather birdlike man himself—the once little boy with blue eyes and red earlocks described in his memoirs was now bald, without eyebrows, slightly beaky, and somewhat avian in his physical delicacy—he was quite mad for birds. With his penchant for the mystical and the pantheistic, he thought birds were possessed of some obvious if undefined spiritual qualities. I forget the name of his lost parakeet; it was endearing rather than grand or comical; it might have been something like Farfele.

In any case, the morning after that evening my wife happened to find a parakeet in a park near our apartment. I called Singer, who grew quite excited. "My darling Farfele has two dots over its beak. Does dis boid?" The telephone balanced between my head and shoulder, my wife nearby holding the parakeet gently in her hand, I checked it for dots over the beak. None. "Farfele has a bright yellow spot at the tip of his right wing. Does maybe your boid have such a spot?" No such spot. Great writers put you in their world, and here I was, in my own kitchen, suddenly become a character in an Isaac Bashevis Singer story. We went through another few checkpoints, when we both concluded that the parakeet my wife had found was not the dear and esteemed Farfele, he should only live and be well. I remember being disappointed that this was not Singer's bird, for it would have been a fine way for me to repay him, however partially, for all that I felt I owed him.

ONE of the things I owed him was—and remains—the important debt of helping to put me in touch with my own almost entirely lost historical past. My guess is that many of his readers were in the same condition as I, and that this was at least part of the profit we all derived from him and part, too, of the explanation for his popularity among American Jewish readers. What this condition might be called is Jewish historical blackout. I know I was not alone in suffering it. Brought up in a nonobserving but nonetheless proudly Jewish home in Chicago, I was sent to Hebrew school, where I was instructed in the pronunciation of Hebrew letters and vowels and in the meaning of a few words, and from which I was freed at my bar mitzvah. Later I took pride in the formation of the state of Israel. Athletes, actors, writers who happened to be Jewish always had special pull with me. I enjoyed an uncomplicated, happy Jewish chauvinism.

Yet I knew very little about Judaism and even less about my own background as a Jew. And by my own background I mean my own family's relatively recent history in Eastern Europe. My

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father's father was very serious about his Judaism, and about his Jewishness, too, having been an early Zionist and, I am told, one of the important figures in Hebrew education in Montreal. He spoke very little English, and on the four or five occasions we were together—the last when I was eighteen—we were hardly able to communicate at all, which is one of the great regrets of my life. I should have liked to have learned not only more about him but about our family history in Bialystok, whence he came to settle first briefly in St. Paul, Minnesota, and then finally and not very successfully in Montreal.

Because I was never really able to cross the barrier of our different languages to speak with my grandfather, I never learned about his (and hence my own) forebears, and so my own personal family history stops, dead and very incomplete, with him. (My other grandparents had died either before I was born or in my infancy.) My mother and my father, both the children of immigrants, were unable to tell me anything about their parents' parents. In bustling, crowded lives, hungry for success and assimilation, neither apparently ever bothered to ask. I have found that a vast preponderance of my Jewish friends and acquaintances, at least those of East European ancestry, are in the same condition of ignorance. To be so oddly pastless has always seemed extraordinary to me, especially for Jews, curious, talkative, endlessly self-analyzing people that they tend to be.

Through fiction, Isaac Bashevis Singer—and I.J. (Israel Joshua) Singer, his older brother, who was also a novelist—filled in some of the gaps in my ignorance in a way that reading history and scholarship was never quite able to do. The brothers Singer made the world of East European Jewry come alive for me like no one else; their portrayals of life among Jews in backwater shtetls and in cities like Warsaw, Lublin, and Lodz had a vividness that surpassed—not that there needs to be a competition about this—anyone else I had read. Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote about Warsaw the way Theodore Dreiser wrote about Chicago. When you read him you felt you had been there, walked the city's streets, "come into possession of it," as Henry James might have said. And what one came into possession of was a world much richer than one had hitherto imagined.

IF PART of Isaac Bashevis Singer's success derived from his putting many of his readers in touch with a past that had hitherto been closed off to them, perhaps a larger part was owing to his sheer powers of storytelling. In interviews, lectures, public statements, Singer insisted over and over that writers must, on some level, give their readers pleasure. For him this pleasure was to be had through narrative. In his Nobel Lecture in Stockholm, after reading a paragraph in Yiddish about how the honor bestowed upon him was also a recognition of the Yiddish language in which he wrote, Singer said:

> The storyteller and poet of our time, as in any other time, must be an entertainer of the spirit in the full sense of the word, not just a preacher of social or political ideals. There is no paradise for bored readers and no excuse for tedious literature that does not intrigue the reader, uplift his spirit, give him the joy and escape that true art always grants.

Singer not only wrote entertainingly but did so for a wider audience than most serious writers any longer even hope for. The distinction between high or sophisticated and popular art was wiped out in his work. He won the acclaim of critics and the devotion of true though not necessarily university-educated readers. Many years ago a cousin of mine, a very intelligent woman then in her early forties, who had never gone to college and who had no particular literary interests, mentioned that she and her husband were off for a week-long holiday in Bermuda and asked if I had anything in the apartment that she might take to read on the beach. Much that was in my personal library—poetry, criticism, history, philosophy—seemed inappropriate. What I eventually offered her was Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel, *The Slave*. She loved it. "A marvelous book," she reported to me upon her return. "By the way, this Singer, in what century did he live?"

Embedded in that question, I thought, was a fine compliment—a compliment with a touch of unconscious critical wisdom behind it. For not the least attraction of Singer's fiction is its timelessness. He could write about the Upper West Side of Manhattan in its current state of sad decay and ring just the right note of contemporaneity; he could also drop back a lengthy fifty or seventy years, as in *The Family Moskat*, or a full century, as in *The Manor*, or three full centuries, as in *Satan in Goray*. He could write outside time, as in his famous story, "Gimpel the Fool," which has the feel of a tale passed down from generation to generation in the manner of pure folk art. No modern writer in any literature that I know is so adept at setting his stories anywhere he wishes temporally. This ability sets much of Singer's writing finally beyond time, which is of course where everyone who thinks himself an artist wishes to be.

THE timeless quality in Singer's work comes from his having grown up in something very near a time warp. Singer was born in 1904, in the village of Leoncin, in the province of Warsaw, the second of four surviving children of parents with long lines of rabbis on both sides: his father claimed an ancestor who was a disciple of the 18th-century founder of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov. Singer's father was himself a man of impressive piety (as readers of *In My Father's*

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Court know), superior in his learning, and a bit aloof from the world, a Jew who wore the clothes and practiced the customs of the Hasid and who as a boy and young man had wished to live with the kind of purity that would allow him to become saintly and enable him to perform miracles. In *Love and Exile*, one of his autobiographical works, Singer describes his father as "good-natured, full of faith in almost all people. His only desire was to have time and strength to serve God and study His Torah."

Singer's mother was a very different story. The daughter of the rabbi of Bilgoray, she is said (in Paul Kresh's *Isaac Bashevis Singer: The Magician of West 86th Street*) to have taught herself to read Hebrew and to have known the Bible "almost by heart." She was sharp, doubting, penetrating: worldly where her husband tended to be otherworldly, pessimistic where he tended to be optimistic, arguing with God where he tried only to understand Him. Of his mother Singer wrote that

> she suffered not only her own afflictions but also those of mankind. I could see in her eyes great compassion when she read in the Yiddish newspaper about those who were run over, robbed, raped, beaten. Every news item made her wince in resentment against the Creator who could see all this misery and remain silent.

"In our house," Singer noted, "the coming of the Messiah was taken most literally." Not, however, by everybody. Not by his sister Hinde Esther, thirteen years older than Singer, and especially not by his brother Israel Joshua, his elder by eleven years. Like many others of his generation, Israel Joshua had been won from their father's ways by the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment. Extreme piety and contempt for that piety existed side by side not only among the Jews of Warsaw but in the Singer home itself. So did superstition and rationality. After a brief stint as a rabbi in Leoncin, for example, Singer's father was hired to run a yeshiva in the town of Radzymin, where he was also to serve as an assistant to the rabbi, whose specialty was making barren women fertile through the use of magical charms.

Around this time, I. J. Singer had already begun to read forbidden books—and, in the Singer household, anything that was not the Bible or a commentary on the Bible was forbidden. It was I. J. Singer, swept up by the *Haskalah*, who reacted most strongly to what he took to be the medieval world of his father and the Hasidim. In his memoir of his boyhood in the shtetls of Poland, *Of a World That Is No More*, a memoir that is a useful counter to any temptation to sentimentalize the life of ultra-Orthodox Jews in that setting, I. J. Singer emphasizes the superstition, coarseness, and sheer difficulty of shtetl life.

Isaac Bashevis Singer never needed to be the rebel that his brother was, though of course he, too, would eventually leave the ways in which he was raised. Outwardly at least he was milder than his brother, less angry, more open to experience. And experience, living where and when he did, came at him with a great roaring whoosh. Within the Singer household and without, tumult was a staple of daily life. The house in Krochmalna Street in Warsaw where the Singers lived was also where Rabbi Singer conducted his *beth din*, which, as Singer has described it, "was a kind of blend of court of law, synagogue, house of study, and, if you will, psychoanalyst's office where people of troubled spirits could come to unburden themselves." As for Krochmalna Street, it "was full of people, and they all seemed to be screaming." The Jewish section of Warsaw, he remarks in *The Family Moskat*, "was like a bit of Baghdad transplanted into the Western world."

When Singer was thirteen years old, Warsaw was more than 40-percent Jewish. Krochmalna Street teemed with the color and multifariousness of Jewish life, which included rabbis and thieves, artisans and con men, peddlers and prostitutes, hawkers of fruit, vegetables, and radical ideas, fanatics religious and secular. What a lovely enticing prospect for a future novelist to view from the balcony of his parents' apartment! Yet Singer, when young, could only consider it from a distance. As the apparently autobiographical narrator of his novel *Shosha* puts it, "From the time I can first remember, I heard him [his rabbi father] repeat the phrase, 'It is forbidden.' Everything I wanted to do was a transgression."

Less rich but no less rewarding to the future novelist were Singer's trips, with his mother and younger brother Moishe, to his mother's family in the then Austrian-occupied town of Bilgoray on the Polish-Austrian border. There, during World War I, they stayed for fully four years, and there Singer saw Jewish life as it had been lived for centuries. The day was clocked by ritual and prayer. Modernity was for the most part locked out; as Singer noted, "the common people were even more devout than the scholars." Although pockets of the Enlightenment existed, such as at the home of Todros, the hunchbacked watchmaker whom Singer later used as a character in *The Family Moskat*, "on Yom Kippur eve," as Singer wrote in *In My Father's Court*, "the whole town wept." Here Singer was able to witness aspects of Jewish life that had not changed for centuries. "In this world of old Jewishness," Singer wrote, "I found a treasure trove."

Life, it seems, conspires to supply great artists with the material they require. But what is impressive about Singer is how early he knew what kind of writer he wanted to be. He quickly determined that the literature of political and social concern, a vein that his already famous brother had been working, was not for him. He knew straightaway that the delimitations of modernism in literature—with its difficulties, its de-

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termination not to worry about any audience but that of fellow artists, its concentration on the problems of art quite as much as if not more than those presented by life—were not for him. "One Kafka in a century," he would later say, "is enough." If Singer was in any way aesthetically radical, it was in the sensuality of his stories and in the use he made in his fiction of the celestial and nether worlds of the occult, the world of spirits.

Although Singer attempted briefly to write his stories in Hebrew, nothing he did in that language pleased him. Neither, at first, did his writing in Yiddish. But it was not long before he hit his stride and his prose caught its correct and confident cadence. He published his first stories, in Warsaw journals, in his early twenties. After he emigrated to America in 1935, Singer stopped writing fiction for a period of five years or so, in despair about both the future of Yiddish and his own then-uprooted life. But once he resumed, he never looked back, and his flow of work—novels, stories, autobiographies, children's tales—ceased only with his death earlier this year.

Paul Kresh, in his biography of Singer, quotes a Yiddish journalist, Samuel L. Shneiderman, who worked on the same Warsaw journal, *Literary Pages*, with the young Isaac Bashevis Singer and who recalled his early mastery:

> His style—ah that style. From the beginning it was the envy of other Yiddish writers. His mastery of transition, for example—how gracefully he glides from description to dialogue, from the ambience of a place to the action happening there. What a storyteller! The literary world of Warsaw saw it right away—the richness of the language, the imaginative blending of the absolutely real and the totally fantastic—all absolutely new in Yiddish writing.

There are no Mozarts in literature, no true child prodigies, but Singer was apparently as much a natural as a writer can hope to be. As an artist he seems to have come into the world fully formed, so good at his craft so young, so able to vary his style from realistic family chronicle to novels and stories nearly surreal in their dalliance with mysticism to fiction strongly folkloric in its feeling. One does not have the sense of development in Singer's work. He started strong and stayed strong, except for a tailing off toward the end, when his fiction began to lose its imaginative energy and turned very dark. It is much to the point that so knowledgeable a critic as Ruth R. Wisse considers *Satan in Goray*, Singer's first novel, also his greatest.

SINGER'S work, though not all of the same quality, is bound together by his central concerns, which are at their heart religious. Other modern writers may talk in their fiction about man's soul and his relation to God, but they cannot keep their minds on the subject the way that Singer did throughout an entire career. He could never stop thinking of it. It is what his books, however sexy, charming, or strange they may separately be, are always and finally about.

Yet what exactly do Singer's many novels and stories mean? "I find myself full of faith and full of doubt," he once said. A lifelong student of Spinoza, Kant, and Schopenhauer, a ceaseless reader in the literature of the occult, more than a browser in the wisdom literature of Judaism, Singer always possessed the literary appetite of the quester after ultimate meanings. Did he, it seems fair to ask, find any?

It is easy to ignore this question because Singer's stories and novels provide so many subsidiary rewards. He recreated—or, perhaps better, re-imagined—a world, that of East European Jewry, razed by the monstrousness of history; and the death of that world, as many have commented, seems to make Singer's recreation of it all the more potent in its magic. Within it, he found an almost endless number of stories to tell, stories of piety and impiety, tradition and the flouting of tradition, stories of derring-do, comedy, sadness, horror, and love—always and endlessly love.

Over and over again Singer insisted that at the heart of all good novels is a love story. "All stories," he said, "are love stories." And all Singer's love stories dealt with sex, for he was a writer who gave ample credit to sex as a drive, a source of human pleasure and trouble, and (most useful for a teller of tales) complication. Some of Singer's more old-fashioned readers used to complain about the sex in his fiction, but most of this sex, it must be stressed, is described with fine economy. Singer is never pornographic but instead powerfully suggestive. In *Scum*, his last, also very sex-ridden, novel, how this works is nicely on display early in the book when Singer notes merely about his forty-seven-year-old hero, Max Barabander: "What he could do with women no one, except the women involved, would believe." La Rochefoucauld said that a filthy mind never sleeps, and here, surely, is a sentence for it to consider in the late night hours.

Over the years critics have argued a fair amount about which are Singer's greatest strengths and which his greatest weaknesses. Many are ready to jettison his two ample family-chronicle novels, *The Family Moskat* and *The Manor*. Neither of these books, it is true, is nearly so well-shaped or powerful as I. J. Singer's *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, a great novel at whose center is perhaps the most extraordinary villain in all of literature, the entire country, no less, of Poland, which, I. J. Singer concludes, deserves all that it has suffered because of its horrendous treatment of the Jews. True enough, Isaac Bashevis Singer did not have his brother's powers of construction, and *The Family Moskat* and *The Manor* are sometimes cumbersome, often creaky—both were written, as were all

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of Singer's novels with the exception of *Satan in Goray*, for serialization in the *Jewish Daily Forward*. But both nevertheless contain magnificent things: characters, cityscapes, the sense of a destiny spun out of control, the feeling of life becoming unmoored without the anchor of tradition.

Others think Singer at his best in the mid-length novel—in such books as *The Slave*, *The Magician of Lublin*, or *Enemies: A Love Story*. Singer himself claimed to prefer the short story over all other forms, since in the short story "a writer can reach for perfection—more than in a novel." Though there seems to be no critical unanimity on which are Singer's best novels, there is general agreement on which are his best stories. A collection of the latter would include "Gimpel the Fool," "The Gentleman from Cracow," "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy" and "Taibele and Her Demon" (both of which originally appeared in COMMENTARY), "The Little Shoemakers," "The Spinoza of Market Street," perhaps "The Slaughterer" and "A Friend of Kafka." Few of these stories, it is worth noting, have directly to do with the spirits from the nether world that are sometimes a strong element in his fiction.

Many readers identify Singer with, and they think the less of him for, those novels and stories where this element, what Dan Jacobson once nicely termed "the brimstone area," prevails.* By the brimstone area, Jacobson means those supernatural elements—dybbuks, demons, imps, on occasion the devil himself—that usually are evoked by Singer to symbolize the power of evil. An admirer of Singer though he is, Jacobson's is easily the best criticism of this element in Singer's fiction. He argues that

> readers who do not share his predispositions are entitled to find that the "symbolization" to which he refers is sometimes too easily brought about, too lovingly and lengthily dwelt upon, insufficiently used or explained in any subsequent action, and insufficiently distinguished from other symbols of the same kind in many other stories.

Did Singer truly believe in such spirits? He often claimed that he did. At the same time, knowing how the world regards such beliefs, he was not above making fun of them, as when he told his biographer that demons were unlikely to flourish in Israel: "They like overcast skies, old houses. I have looked for demons in the Jewish state, but I have found very few." Elsewhere he said that he would pay half a year's income actually to see a ghost. Yet Singer, a man who distrusted and did not often use metaphors, was quite ready to avail himself of these most extravagant of all metaphors, creatures whom few but the mad have ever seen. He must have been agnostic yet hopeful on the subject. More important, he felt them useful to his fiction. "In a way demons express the human subconscious," he told an interviewer. "But to me the demons also symbolize a life without any faith altogether."

WHAT Singer did believe in, without any question, was God. But to believe in God is not to claim to understand Him. Critics for whom the question of God is not, so to say, a lively one, attribute Singer's power to other factors, from modernist technique to the glory of his storytelling. Still others hold that behind and beyond all the talk of God there is something else in Singer's work that makes it appeal to the modern reader, suffused as that work is, as one critic has it, "with the prevailing contemporary sense of isolation, disintegration, alienation, and dread." But what makes both the technique and the storytelling possible, why Singer is able to seem at once modern and traditional, is his interest in the endless question of what God has in mind, both for us and for the universe.

The persistent attention to this question gives Singer his right to be considered a major artist. Dan Jacobson touches on this point, in a somewhat skeptical way, when considering the absence of "place" in Yiddish writers:

> Theirs is the literature of a people without power (and all its accompanying evils and guilts), without the possession of land, without statehood or political organization, without the freedom to pursue a wide variety of occupations—the literature of a society that was in many immensely important respects maimed and deprived.

All this is quite true and to the point. Yet if your subject is the ways of God toward man, as it indubitably was Isaac Bashevis Singer's, then the Jews of Eastern Europe, for all the reasons Jacobson mentions, are unquestionably your people. After a history of almost unremitting disenfranchisement and persecution, punctuated by pogroms and ending cataclysmically with Nazism, the Jews, above all people, have earned the right to ask certain fundamental questions of God.

Many people in Singer's stories and novels do ask. Asking itself, however, comes near to constituting a transgression. Asa Heshel Bannet, the central character in *The Family Moskat*, is a freethinker who, it turns out, is not very free after all. This same Asa Heshel, toward the end of the novel, reflects bitterly of God: "He creates easily and destroys easily. He has his own laboratory." All Singer's characters have free will—"without free will what is the difference between the throne of glory and the depths of the nether world?" asks a rabbi in the same novel. (Singer himself, during the question-and-answer sessions of his many lectures and readings, used to reply to the question of whether he himself believed in free will by

* "The Problem of Isaac Bashevis Singer," COMMENTARY, February 1965.

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answering: "Of course I believe in free will. What choice have I?") Of Asa Heshel, his first wife observes: "He was one of those who must serve God or die. He had forsaken God, and because of this he was dead—a living body with a dead soul." The simple if devastating point of *The Family Moskat* is that, without God, all of the novel's characters are dead souls, walking corpses. The unforgettable last line of the novel, delivered by a subsidiary character, himself a freethinker, as he awaits the entry of the Nazis into Warsaw, is: "Death is the Messiah. That's the real truth."

Free will, in an Isaac Bashevis Singer novel, usually comes down to little more than the freedom to choose God's way—or to perish. Modern thought will avail a man nothing. As Rabbi Dan Katzenellenbogen tells his grandson Asa Heshel apropos of modern thinking, "The sum and substance of it is that any sin is permitted. That is the root of the matter." Men—and less often women—in Singer's novels and stories are tossed about by their doubts, dreams, desires. Singer's characters suffer from Pascalian restlessness; they cannot sit, alone, quietly in a room for even an hour. "The main thing," says Max Barabander in *Scum*, "was not to remain passive." Singer himself once said: "We run away from boredom into wickedness, and there is almost nothing in between." Well, there is one thing in between—subjects for the novelist.

SINGER made nearly limitless use of the material that issues from this spiritual restlessness. As he told an interviewer in the *Saturday Review* as long ago as 1968:

> To me, in my work, the religious question and the eternal question—why do we live, why do we exist?—are identical. I am not completely a religious writer, but neither am I secular. In my writing religion is always there—even when I write sexy.

To another interviewer he said:

> The supernatural is always in my writing and somehow I always wanted to say to the reader that even though life looks to us chaotic, it is not as chaotic as we think. There is a scheme and design behind it.

What was the scheme, which the design?

Singer was never certain enough to say. In *The Penitent*, the narrator is told by the chief character whose story is at the center of the novel: "If you took one step farther, you'd become a full-fledged Jew." To which he adds: "You also know all the good traits of the real Jew." To this the narrator, clearly speaking for Singer, answers: "That's not enough either. For this you must have faith that everything stated in the holy books was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Unfortunately, I don't have this faith." One can only conjecture in so profound a realm, but my own guess is that Singer wanted this full faith, wanted it ardently, and never found it.

He looked for God, in whom he believed, everywhere. God is in the details, a famous remark has it, and so He lurks in many passages in Singer's novels and stories. In a passage late in *The Family Moskat*, a spy is hung from a tree. "His bare feet dangled above the ditch. A butterfly danced about the fur shako." Birds and cats go about their business in Singer's pages as stars twinkle and the moon cleaves its way through clouds, and the heavens remain eternally the same as people struggle to get through their lives, writhe in their sleep under the burden of their small—though not small to them—worries. There must be a plan behind all this. As Singer writes in *The Penitent*, echoing an old philosophical staple:

> If someone found a watch on an island and said it had been made by itself or that it developed through evolution, he would be considered a lunatic. But according to modern science, the universe evolved all on its own. Is the universe less complicated than a watch?

Because Singer was always interested in the larger design, he was for the most part dismissive, even contemptuous, of politics, especially utopian left-wing politics. In one of his stories, "Guests on a Winter Night," he remarks that, of anarchists and radical students, his mother told him, "these sinful creatures had lost both their world and the world to come." Abram Shapiro, the licentious, contradictory, and finally most winning character in *The Family Moskat*, asked his opinion of who is to blame for the crisis of the Jews in Poland with Hitler at the borders, replies:

> Human nature. You can call a man capitalist, Bolshevik, Jew, *goy*, Tartar, Turk, anything you want, but the real truth is that man is a stinker. If you beat him, he yells. And if the other fellow is beaten, then he develops a theory. Maybe it'll be better in the next world.

As for this world, Singer, from the outset, has always seemed to favor the modest, the traditional, the pious among his characters. Men and women who have accepted life in the full harshness of its terms, who go about their business, their prayers, their unquestioning routines—these Singer admires above all. "It's these little nobodies who for two thousand years have carried all of Jewry on their backs," says Asa Heshel in *The Family Moskat*, "as well as all of Christendom. It is they who have always turned the other cheek." Where things go wrong for characters in a Singer story or novel is precisely at the point where they desert the faith and ways of their fathers, be it in the shtetl of Frampol, in Warsaw, in New York, Israel, or Buenos Aires. That way lies Gehenna.

That way, too, lies some superior fiction. Singer unlooses his magicians, his yeshiva boys rattled

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by enlightened ideas, his women swept away by vanity, and the games begin. Almost always they are sex games. Because the possibility of redemption must be present in his fiction, Singer works best with philanderers. Breaking the seventh commandment makes for better fiction anyway than breaking the sixth: redemption from murder seems distinctly less convincing than redemption from adultery. Besides, adultery, as in the bad old joke about incest, is a game the entire family can play. It is perhaps the most human of sins. As a writer, Singer played a great many variations upon it. Only toward the close did the game begin to run down.

A DARK vein had always run through Singer's writing ("man is a stinker," etc.). But for the better part of his career he was best thought of as a tragicomedian. Comedy is possible even on the road to perdition, and Singer was adept at wringing high-spirited laughter from his depictions of characters as various as Gimpel the Fool and Yasha Mazur, his magician from Lublin. But in his later years the laughter was not even hollow; in fact, it was not there. Singer claimed not to be interested in preaching or sending messages, but reading the flat stories in *The Death of Methuselah* (1988) one could conclude only that its author's view of human beings ended with the observation that men are animals and women whores—case closed. In his last published novel, *Scum*, the redemption of Max Barabander is not even considered. "Oh, Mama, I'm sinking into filth up to my neck," he cries toward the close of the novel. Singer just lets him go under.

How account for this? What could have happened to make Singer, in his last years, so dark—and, one must add, so much less interesting—a writer? For the last twenty years of his life, the world treated him as a great man, showering every sort of pleasing attention upon him, ending with the Nobel Prize, which he won in 1978. He had money, critical acclaim, adoring readers, longevity, every reason to feel a sense of impressive achievement. Yet however playful he may have been at lectures, or with interviewers, or among friends, his late work reveals a writer who found people more disgusting than interesting. Why had his skies become so clouded? Critics used to complain that Singer often had problems with his endings: there is a problem with the ending of his own career.

The inclement Isaac Bashevis Singer is nowhere more evident than in *The Penitent*, a brief novel of 1983. That book, which tells the story of Joseph Shapiro, turns out to be an unrelieved philippic against modernity. Modern culture, Joseph Shapiro claims, is good for breeding only "cynics and whores." Modern philosophy, he avers, has a single theme: "We don't know anything and we cannot know anything." Newspapers pay "tribute to every idolatry and spit at the truth." Crime is on the loose and it is the job of lawyers to see that criminals go free. Animals, God's creatures, are slaughtered in the most hideous ways; when it comes to animals, says Joseph, "every man is a Nazi." The sum total of psychoanalysis is always "that someone else was guilty." And Jews, at least Jews without faith, are no better than anyone else. "Every few months they find a new idol, a new illusion, a new vogue, a new madness. They revere all kinds of murderers, whores, false prophets, clowns. They go wild over every little scribbler, every ham actor, every harlot." But enough.

In an author's note at the end of this novel, Singer makes plain that it was not possible for him to share Joseph Shapiro's belief in "a final escape from the human dilemma, a permanent rescue for all time" where Joseph finds it: in a "return to Jewishness, and not merely to some modern arbitrary Jewishness, but to the Jewishness of my grandfathers and great-grandfathers." But it is plain enough that Singer did share much of his character's unrelenting diagnosis of the hideousness of modern life. At one point in this novel, recounting a relapse into sin after his pledge to return to purity, Joseph says to the narrator, "That's how it is with adultery, with theft, with murder, with a craze for honors or for revenge. There is always a letdown. I don't have to tell *you* about that."

Did life let Singer down in some fundamental way that turned him so against it at the close? He insisted that one could be religious and rebellious simultaneously, believing in God and arguing with Him at the same time: "Those who dedicate their lives to serving God have often dared to question His justice, and to rebel against His seeming neutrality in man's struggle between good and evil."

In the end, it was the prevalence of evil that Singer found overwhelming. He was too good—which is to say, too honest—a writer to report things other than precisely as he found them. Why this dark and troubled truth, coming from a powerful writer at the end of his career, should make for not very interesting art is another question.

What is not in question is that Singer's stories and novels figure to have as long a life as those of any other writer of the past 50 years. He was one of the last living links with the Jewish past in Poland. He wrote in a language that had been given up for dead almost from the time he began to use it and into which he pumped impressive new life. That he survived, endured, triumphed, is as astonishing, even miraculous, a story as any he himself could have written.

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Canons

A Dialogue With Notes

Nancy W. Yos

The Speakers: Classroom, Graduate, Textbook, Undergraduates, Voices, the West, *and* Notes.

Classroom: The theme or title of our little symposium is "Rage, rage, against the dying of the light."

Graduate: Rather intense, that.

Classroom: Well, yes, but we'll overlook it for the moment, shall we? I should point out that the line comes from a poem called "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," by Dylan Thomas.

Notes: *Welsh poet, 1914-53.*

Textbook: I believe it was about his father dying, wasn't it?

Classroom: I believe so. Well, shall we begin?

Graduate: Shall I?

Classroom: Please.

Graduate: We may as well start with the facts. At the university campuses, I understand, at Stanford, at Berkeley, the students are marching.

Undergraduates: Hey hey, ho ho, Western Civ—

Notes: *A common freshman course of study at American colleges. It is a brief survey of the history, art, politics, literature, philosophy, and science of the Western (that is, originally West European) world.*

Undergraduates: —has got to go! We don't want to read any more dead white guys.

Graduate: At Princeton the ghost of Woodrow Wilson—

Notes: *Born 1856, died 1924. The 28th President of the United States, from 1913 to 1921. The President of Princeton University, from 1902 to 1910.*

Graduate: —the ghost of Woodrow Wilson no doubt has fled, and fleeing, too, are the ghosts of the students of 80 years ago, who applauded and stomped their feet in joy after his lectures.

Textbook: That I would have liked to see.

Classroom: Maybe they were freaks even then.

Graduate: Strange mushrooms grow at Columbia and Stanford. Strange barnacles crop up from freshman required reading lists, and Euripides—

Notes: *Greek playwright, probably 479-406 B.C.E.*

Graduate: —is gone, and Aristophanes is gone—

Notes: *Greek playwright, probably 448-380 B.C.E.*

Graduate: —and Montaigne is gone—

Notes: *Michel de Montaigne. French essayist. Born 1533, died 1592.*

Textbook: How the modern nineteen-year-old might love Montaigne, if only he were given him! St. Augustine—

Notes: *African Catholic bishop and saint, born 354, died 430. Author of* The City of God *and the* Confessions.

Textbook: —claims to have seen a man who could command his bottom to break wind as often as he wished, and Vives—

Notes: *Juan Luis Vives, Spanish-born humanist and writer, 1492 to 1540.*

Textbook: —Vives his commentator caps him with another case from his own day of a man who could synchronize his blasts to the meter of verses that were read to him.

Notes: *From "On the Power of the Imagination."*

Classroom: Yes, I see what you mean. I love him already, myself.

Graduate: —and *Henry IV* is replaced—

Notes: *Two plays,* 1 Henry IV *and* 2 Henry IV, *by the English playwright and poet William Shakespeare, 1564 to 1616.*

Textbook: There is some debate about that.

Classroom: Oh, please!

Graduate:—replaced by something hopefully easier, *The Tempest*—

Notes: *Another play of Shakespeare's.*

Classroom: Well, it's shorter and not quite so heavy, anyway.

Graduate:—and they are all replaced by the *Popol Vuh* and the *Bhagavad-Gita.* The strange barnacles I spoke of.

Textbook: Notes?

Notes: *Nothing—sorry.*

Textbook: Well!

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2.

Classroom: A good opening statement for our symposium. It has everything. Thank you.

Graduate: A pleasure.

Classroom: Shall we proceed from there?

Textbook: If I may.

Classroom: Certainly.

Textbook: I know these marching students, and I must say, I have never seen them so awake. This is admirable. They are right. Western Civ *has* got to go, not for the reasons they think, not because—

Undergraduates: Because Western Civ is boring, difficult, and arcane.

Textbook: —no—

Graduate: Because I am sick of having put up with their classroom antics when I was an undergraduate, sick of working furiously to get A's while they yawned in the professor's face and got C's.

Textbook: —well, no—

Classroom: I am glad they have finally gotten up the gumption to go out and demand that they not have to endure it anymore.

Graduate: Perhaps it's my fault, really. I never shook them awake, as I often wanted to, and said "Sit up straight," or, more to the point, "For heaven's sake, if you are so unhappy then go home and tell Mommy and Daddy you don't want to be in college anymore."

Textbook: —well, anyway, now you've missed your chance to scold them and they are gone of their own accord, out of the classroom and into the streets, petitioning, not for release from the campus and permission to go home, which is what I would have thought they wanted, but for the chucking of Western Civ.

Classroom: I would not have thought of that.

Textbook: Nor I.

Classroom: Now that they have brought it up, however, I feel it is an excellent idea.

Graduate: Yes, they are right, it must go for them.

Classroom: Yes. Let it go, let them drop it before they burst a blood vessel carrying it.

Graduate: Yes, for who can do it all? Do you think I did it all?

Textbook: Don't berate yourself too much. No one even attempts to do it all now, and I fear it is only the professors who do not know it. Who can read eighteen books in seventeen weeks—a common load, what with Humanities ("Western Civ Made Easier") and American Histories and Physical Sciences and European Lits to be slogged through—and learn anything from the feat?

Notes: *America: the United States of America, a country made up of the North American continent extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean between Canada and Mexico, together with Alaska and Hawaii. Physical Science: any of the sciences that deal with inanimate matter or energy, as physics, chemistry, geology, etc. Europe: continent between Asia and the Atlantic Ocean bordered by the Ural Mountains in the east.* Webster's Dictionary.

Classroom: Indeed, who can learn anything from the feat, especially if one is already hard-pressed, as all students are, by courses that really matter, like accounting or data processing?

Graduate: Who can hurtle from Shakespeare to Latin American history—

Notes: *Latin America: that part of the Western Hemisphere south of the United States, in Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and South America, where Spanish, Portuguese, and French are the official languages.* Webster's.

Graduate: —to Chaucer—

Notes: *Geoffrey Chaucer, English poet. Probably 1342 to 1400.*

Graduate: —to chemistry to Swift—

Notes: *Jonathan Swift, Irish-born writer and satirist, 1667 to 1745.*

Graduate: —and back again, and not emerge dizzy and fed up?

Textbook: It is not merely that Western Civ has got to go. No, I will tell you what must happen. The required course and the survey course both have got to go.

Classroom: Yes, it is the required course—

Textbook: Not the prerequisite, like the biology course for future doctors; that kind of thing is necessary.

Graduate: Yes, I see that.

Classroom: —no, it is the required course, the science class demanded of an art major, the history class demanded of an aspiring teacher, that causes university lecture halls to fill up with legions of slack, stupid students—

Graduate: Who most ferociously do not want to be there.

Classroom: —who listlessly copy down whatever the professor writes on the chalkboard, and who brazenly go to sleep during every filmstrip.

Textbook: I've been a pillow often enough myself. Memo to all professors: do not show filmstrips.

Graduate: The required course is the platter on which the students lie in cold lumps, like dead staring fish.

Textbook: The required course is the zoo the students visit every third Wednesday or Friday, as the mood takes them, maybe fifteen or forty-five minutes late, and where, with only the mildest curiosity, they watch the professor cavort like an exhibit for his allotted showtimes.

Classroom: Sometimes it's a good three hours, nothing less than a foretaste of Purgatory.

Notes: *In Christian, especially Roman Catholic belief, a kind of middle ground between heaven*

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and hell, where some souls go to make reparation for their sins before entering heaven.

Textbook: And it is the survey course which chokes the student with work and books, so much work, so many books, that the bored student is simply amused by the volume and obscurity of it, and the good student numbed.

Graduate: Yes. It is thanks to the survey course that we career around the greats of English literature—

Notes: *England: a division of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, occupying most of the southern half of the island of Great Britain.* Webster's, *again.*

Graduate: —in three months, like dieters wolfing down eighteen different vitamins and minerals in a chocolate milkshake.

Textbook: Yes, I know what you're going to say. When it would be better to savor real food slowly, each morsel as it comes.

Classroom: Yes. It is the survey course which takes us on a tour of Asian history—

Notes: *Asia: the largest continent. Situated in the Eastern Hemisphere, bounded by the Arctic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, and separated from Europe by the Ural Mountains.* Webster's.

Classroom: —from Peking man—

Notes: *A type of early man of the Pleistocene Age, known from fossil remains found near Peking (now Beijing), China.* Webster's.

Classroom: —to 1945, also in three months.

Graduate: Survey courses boast titles like "World Literature to 1900" or "Science 101." And it strikes me that on top of everything else, they help assure students that whatever happened before 1945, or maybe even 1965, is somehow quaint and queer and safely lumped together for quick disposal.

Textbook: Yes, the lines blur. Survey courses are often requirements, requirements are always gigantic surveys—may as well get it all over with. Now if you stretch your imagination and consider the broadest possible survey combined with the—what is the word?—somehow, the—

Graduate: The most adamantine? The most often required?

Textbook: —yes, the most adamantine requirement, you have that poor abortion, that joke [**Classroom** and **Graduate** join in] Western Civ 101-102.

Textbook: Exactly.

Classroom: Aristotle—

Notes: *Greek philosopher, pupil of Plato. 384 to 322* B.C.E.

Classroom: —on Tuesday, Chippendale chairs—

Notes: *Chippendale: an 18th-century style of furniture characterized by graceful lines and, often, rococo ornamentation.*

Classroom: —as I was saying, Chippendale chairs on Wednesday, and that is only the 9 A.M. class.

Graduate: Yes, you might go on to Basic Computing at 10:45 and Developing Nations at noon. Yes, fellow students, you are right, I don't blame you. It has got to go.

Textbook: It would save everybody a lot of pain if the giant were killed, along with all his progeny.

Graduate: Giant? Progeny?

Textbook: Well, what I mean is, this Western Civ is more than it appears, don't you think? It's more than just a two-semester course that you could endure and be done with in your freshman year. It's every required course, every survey.

Classroom: All that we've been talking about.

Textbook: Yes. It's every Humanities class, every Art History to 1900 and American Lit and Biology for Non-Science Majors. It's everything that distracts the student from what he really wants. After all, he's paying the bill, isn't he? When you go into a restaurant, do you let the waiter order your meal for you? What do people go to college for? Has it escaped the university's notice? They go to get job training, and the university has not made it cheap. They and their parents have not spent all that money in order to find out who painted the *Mona Lisa.*

Notes: *Portrait of an Italian woman, painted by the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci. Born 1452, died 1519.*

Classroom: I begin to see what you mean. You mean that you're sorry they're all so bored, and you wish they had the manners and the wit to endure the boredom; but that, as long as they obviously haven't got the manners, they may as well be let go. . . .

Graduate: Yes. You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

Notes: *From* A Christmas Carol. *Charles Dickens. 1812 to 1870.*

Classroom: But no, no, I see. You mean to let them go, everyone, everything. . . .

Textbook: Students, professors, classes, even the hapless writers of college handbooks, who have to try to explain away the fact that, in this day and age, liberal arts and science classes even exist.

Graduate: Nay, are requirements.

Textbook: Exactly.

Graduate: And the handbooks then go on to warn the student of his fate. He must eat so many credit hours of so many humane subjects in order eventually to become a lawyer, he knows not why.

Classroom: Evidently because the dean personally wants him to be a well-rounded individual with the basic facts of the Napoleonic wars—

Notes: *The wars fought in Europe from about 1795 to 1815, as various nations struggled to prevent the French general Napoleon Bonaparte (Emperor Napoleon I) from conquering the*

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whole of Europe and bringing it into his French empire.

Classroom: —at his fingertips.

Textbook: I have seen them satisfy their college Math/Science requirement by memorizing the rules of carbon-14 dating the night before the midterm.

Notes: *Carbon-14 dating: a method of estimating the age of organic objects by measuring the amount of radioactive carbon-14 remaining in them.* Webster's.

Classroom: Math-slash-Science. Think about that for ten seconds.

Textbook: Yes, and final exams are rarely cumulative, so that was that.

Classroom: Well . . . well.

3.

Graduate: Are you ready? Come with me now to college, come into the silent classrooms, breathe the very air smelly with animosity, sit in the chairs with the leaders of the next century, all clutching their stomachs with the pain of boredom, watch professors muffle their rage in the silence as they fling the required survey truckloads of books at the mass, see even the good students, students who are not averse to reading dead white guys, standing in the middle of the room astonished at how many dead white guys there are, see the bored students forced to poke one last time at the corpse of the Western heritage, before finally thankfully putting it away with the Roman numerals—

Notes: *System of numerical notation used by the ancient Romans and still in some use today.*

Graduate: —they may have learned in the fourth grade . . . see the dead queens flee in darkness—

Notes: *A quotation from* Main Street, *a novel by Sinclair Lewis. 1885 to 1951.*

Graduate: —and the formless lessons of childhood, in which I think we put on a lot of skits and boiled a lot of water over bunsen burners—that was Math/Science—repeat, again, again, again, again.

Textbook: Not a bad speechifier, yourself.

Graduate: Thank you. I asked my seven-year-old nephew how he likes school. He said: "We never do anything."

Classroom: He is ready for college, where he'll have to play at doing too much.

Textbook: It's true. Make no mistake. Students like the ones marching at Stanford and Berkeley understand intuitively that the American university has almost succeeded in cutting off its own head—

Graduate: Perhaps a better metaphor would be that it has left the WC without flushing.

Textbook: Yes, but balks at the last stroke.

Classroom: You think they should be allowed to do it?

Textbook: I do. Let the heads roll. Why pester them with these nattering little Muses, when—

Notes: *Muses: in Greek mythology, the nine goddesses governing literature and the arts and sciences.* Webster's.

Textbook: —when all they want is to be honest dental hygienists and CPA's? Make them electives, deans, please, spare them the pain. And then let me make you an ideal world: for once the giant is killed, those few students who still have a suspicion what a real education is will be glad, I should think, to go after the severed head, mark where it lands, and retrieve it to study it in detail.

Graduate: In detail! What a sweet, strange word! Imagine learning all about, say, the reign of Rameses II—

Notes: *A great pharaoh of the nineteenth dynasty, New Kingdom, in ancient Egypt, who reigned approximately 1300 to 1233* B.C.E.

Graduate: —in ancient Egypt—

Notes: *A country in northeast Africa, on the Mediterranean and Red Seas.* Webster's.

Graduate: —and nothing else.

Classroom: Imagine reading a poem or two of Emily Dickinson's—

Notes: *American poet. Born 1830, died 1886.*

Classroom: —and nothing else, in a three-month course called, oh—

Graduate: "Two Poems of Emily Dickinson 101."

Classroom: That would be as strange as reading Thucydides—

Notes: *Ancient Greek historian, probably 460-400* B.C.E.

Classroom: —at age eleven, which is what schoolboys still do in Greece, I am told.

Notes: *Greece: country in the southern Balkan peninsula, including many islands in the Aegean, Ionian, and Mediterranean Seas.* Webster's.

Textbook: You needn't keep saying *Webster's.* Just nod your head once.

Graduate: Imagine being in your college Western Civ class and recognizing the name "Thucydides" when the professor speaks it, fancy remembering it from when you were a child!

Textbook: Ah, you ask too much. That would be as strange as reading two books *about the same subject*—

Classroom: Ah, yes, there's the rub!

Textbook: —in one class: two biographies of Julius Caesar, for example.

Notes: *Roman general and statesman, born, circa 100* B.C.E.*; dictator of Rome from 49 to 44; assassinated, 44.*

Classroom: Or perhaps both *Capital*—

Notes: *A book written by the German philosopher and economist Karl Marx. 1818 to 1883.*

Classroom: —and *The Wealth of Nations*—

Notes: *A book written by the Scottish philosopher*

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and economist Adam Smith. Born 1723, died 1790.

Classroom: —in a macroeconomics course, because they're both about money, you see.

Textbook: Yes. Yes, professors are so fond of saying, "Dante—

Notes: *Dante Alighieri, Italian poet, author of* The Divine Comedy. *1265 to 1321.*

Textbook: "—really deserves a whole semester to himself."

Graduate: Yes, I suppose he does.

Textbook: I have never seen him given one, but they say he does. Why can't he be given one? He could now, you know, in this ideal world we have made, where all the bored mannerless students have been released from their thousand private Purgatories and you and I, sir, study things in detail.

Graduate: Yes. Give him a course all to himself, professors, and then give it to me, not necessarily years from now, when I am myself an associate professor of medieval Italian—

Notes: *Italy: country in southern Europe mostly on a peninsula extending into the Mediterranean and including the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.*

Graduate: —of medieval Italian literature, but now, right now. I believe I could learn more from it than from all the European History 101's in the world, in which Dante is always seen in his proper context—

Textbook: I know, somewhere between the Roman empire and—

Notes: *Roman empire: those lands in Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor belonging to the empire established by Augustus in 27* B.C.E. *The empire remained undivided and governed from Rome until 395* C.E.

Classroom: Between the Roman empire and 1945. You may correct me if I am wrong, but from the look of them I believe these students spent most of their childhood being told that they would get to something next year, that this was too hard for them, that someone else would teach them that when they were older. How else can I explain their patience under a boredom that ought to inspire them to kill? Yet they seem pathetically resigned to it.

Graduate: It's true. "Next year" never seemed to come, and like my nephew we, too, never seemed to do anything. We learned docility, though.

Textbook: Comes in handy.

Classroom: Sure does. Now they are in college, and have to be spoon-fed all the things that the poor sheltered professors seem to think they ought to have learned before puberty.

Textbook: Yes, this is college. But suppose we have made an ideal world? Shouldn't things be different?

4.

The West: Wait. Oddly enough, things seem to be becoming different.

Classroom: What?

The West: Things seem to be changing. Look again at the marching students. Don't you notice them carefully emphasizing only that *Western* Civ has got to go, that they don't want to read any more dead white guys?

Graduate: Yes. I also notice that if I were to enroll at Stanford in the near future, I would apparently soon be reading—

The West: Almost as many Mayan creation myths as philippics of Demosthenes.

Notes: *Greek statesman, probably 384 to 322* B.C.E. *noted for the speeches ("philippics") he gave warning his countrymen of the ambitions of their future conqueror, Philip of Macedon.*

Graduate: —yes, or clauses of the United States Constitution.

Notes: *The basic laws of the United States, establishing the workings of the government and the rights of the people; a written document, consisting of seven original articles and 27 amendments.*

Textbook: Well. This is very strange.

The West: It is. So many options lay before us. I muse on our options, and I think the Western Civ course could have been retained, with its massive workload intelligently cut—

Textbook: We could have studied Western things in magical detail.

The West: —yes—

Classroom: Or the students who do not want it could have been released to pursue their degrees, and the good students could have tried to cope with the work without their yawnings and distractions—

The West: —but instead, this is happening. Western Civ is retained, and everybody has to go to it, and the workload is as absurd as ever, but now the books are new—shorter—

Classroom: Easier—different—better.

The West: —yes. Now instead of swallowing twenty Western classics, or excerpts thereof, in seventeen weeks, they swallow ten Inca fables, a Polynesian earth goddess hymn—

Notes: *Polynesia: a major division of the Pacific islands east of the international date line, including Hawaii, Samoa, Tonga, the Society Islands, Marquesas Islands, and so on.*

Textbook: Oh, good Lord, spare us the halcyon days of the earth goddess, when everyone was good and kind!

The West: —amen to that.

Graduate: —and a few short accounts of Sioux burial practices.

The West: And possibly they might read *Medea*—

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Notes: *A play written by the Greek dramatist Euripides.*

The West: —because even though it is Western, at least it's about women.

Graduate: Well. This is very strange.

Textbook: This was a very strange option to pick.

The West: Yes. Once again the students seem to have thought of something that would not have occurred to me. Or they are at least endorsing a trend that I would not have applauded myself.

Textbook: Nor I. In our ideal world, I would have let the students go. I would gladly have spared them these hypercourses in Western civilization—

Classroom: Thus sparing them the danger to health that comes from nearly hyperventilating with boredom—

Textbook: —quite so.

Graduate: I would have gone on, even alone, to study things in magical detail.

The West: Exactly. But now I think they want something else, or are willing to acquiesce in something else.

Graduate: Yes. You would think upon first seeing them marching that they really did want to chuck Western Civ, but now I see that, being as practical as their elders, they are agreeable to compromise.

Classroom: We'll have to keep a course called Western Civ, just for appearances. But secretly, we'll be reading about Chichen Itza and studying !Kung grammar. Will that do?

The West: And what do the students answer?

Undergraduates: Yes.

Textbook: Indeed yes, what else are we to think? I have no idea what came first, a demand from the students to learn about things like Aztec architecture, or a university curriculum coordinator's decision to lighten up on the kids by giving them something new to read in the WC.

Graduate: No, I don't know what came first, either, but I have not heard that any students have taken to the campus streets, shouting "Hey hey, ho ho, Masai tribal histories have got to go." This new arrangement must be all right with them.

The West: I cannot account, in fact, for this new arrangement, this university fascination with the third world, with all the voices of faraway forests and mountains.

Textbook: Is everything Western now icky?

Classroom: You don't suppose it could be guilt, do you?

The West: Beg pardon?

Classroom: Does the university feel some sort of guilt, for which it fancies it should do penance by, say, rather extravagantly spitting on the chains that hold the suffering third world in bondage? By snubbing the words, the books, the imperialist-justifying bombast of dead white men?

Graduate: By spitting, in short, on the classics?

Classroom: Yes.

Textbook: No, I doubt it.

The West: It cannot be guilt that makes a Western Civ professor weed out John Locke—

Notes: *English philosopher. Born 1632, died 1704.*

The West: —in favor of, say, an anthology of Caribbean folklore.

Notes: *Caribbean: of the Caribbean Sea (a part of the Atlantic Ocean, bounded by the West Indies, Central America, and the northern coast of South America) or its islands.*

The West: That would be a silly sort of penance, when a far better atonement is so clear: not to read their creation myths and battle songs as some kind of sop to them—

Classroom: Ah, yes, we're all classicists together.

The West: —but to ship them, really, some of our great books.

Textbook: I quite agree. Perhaps even some books about freedom.

Graduate: Some book by Thomas Jefferson—

Notes: *American statesman, President of the United States (1801 to 1809), author of the Declaration of Independence. Born 1743, died 1826.*

Classroom: No! I am aghast. A dead white guy, and a slaveowner!

Graduate: Well, do you think one of the enslaved in the Southern Hemisphere—

The West: Whose remote ancestors' epics are now considered a fair part of the Western heritage, unbeknownst to himself—

Graduate: —precisely—would come in from harvesting our morning coffee and bananas just long enough . . . just long enough to read a little Jefferson—what *is* that damned noise?

Voices: The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs . . . Octavius began by gradations to exalt himself over them, to draw to himself . . . the aim, therefore, of patriots . . . to draw to himself the functions of the senate . . . saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred . . . hear ye not the hum of mighty workings in the human mart . . . the aim of patriots was to set limits to the power which the ruler should be suffered to exercise . . . all of us have the right to criticize . . . redressing injury, revenging wrong . . . to criticize actions taken by the city . . . from foreign yoke to free the helpless native . . . their clans came out like the countless flocks of birds . . . this limitation was what they meant . . . cleave, O cleave to that which still is left . . . let my people . . . meant by liberty . . . people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness . . . then a slow flush of tender gold shall mantle the great plains . . . that government with all its powers did not terrify me into doing anything unjust . . then shall grapes hang wild and reddening. . . .

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Notes: *Gentlemen: Thomas Jefferson. Tacitus. John Stuart Mill. John Keats. Pericles. George Gordon, Lord Byron. Homer. William Wordsworth. Exodus. Virgil. Socrates.*

The West: Well. There's your damned noise. There's your justifying bombast. Did you read Jefferson in college?

Graduate: No.

Textbook: Certainly not. Universities think that is the sort of thing best kept under wraps.

Graduate: Why on earth?

Classroom: I offered that it might be guilt. Perhaps there is something comforting for the professor, after his morning coffee and bananas, in going to school and teaching the oppressed harvesters' old creation myths and battle songs, rather than all that imperialist-justifying bombast.

Textbook: No, no. That would be a silly sort of penance, when a far better atonement is so clear—

The West: Yes, gentlemen, we have said so. Another memo to professors: if you like truth and justice, well . . . well, don't throw away Western books.

5.

Graduate: The new arrangement: the fascination with all the voices of faraway forests and mountains.

The West: Yes?

Graduate: It does seem so amenable to all. Whatever the reason, the students are not drawing swords on Quetzalcoatl for the honor of Thomas Aquinas or Jeremy Bentham, are they?

Notes: *St. Thomas Aquinas, Italian theologian and philosopher. 1225 to 1274. Jeremy Bentham, English philosopher, economist. 1748 to 1832.*

Graduate: There must be some practical reason why this new arrangement seems so amenable to all.

Classroom: Western classics are boring and difficult, it is true.

The West: In comparison to what?

Textbook: And what are you laughing at?

Graduate: A good question. Here's another: I'm laughing because I suddenly wonder if a people famed for their pragmatism would tolerate for one moment an educational system that did not serve them beautifully.

Textbook: I suppose they wouldn't. What are you leading up to?

Graduate: Education reform. We here can complain in our way, and sometimes as a nation we all complain in another. We think we're fond of education. Sometimes we talk wistfully of going "back to basics" in elementary schools, as if we could also go back to the days of white muslin summer gowns and Model-T Fords. And the little children put on skits, and high-school graduates can't write, and the universities pitch out the classics, as if to atone for ever having liked them a bit. And the students are agreeable. And after they graduate they go out to work, and our society runs as smoothly as you could wish.

Textbook: So smoothly that the third of the American population which is illiterate creates not even the merest ripple of trouble.

The West: You've heard of that statistic, too? A third of the population?

Textbook: Yes. If it's true, a third get by from day to day, all their lives, without knowing how to read and write or do simple arithmetic. A third of the population. How many people is that?

Classroom: Millions.

Textbook: When you think about it, this ignorance does not necessarily reflect badly on them.

The West: Certainly not. Most people throughout history have probably been illiterate, barons and kings included.

Classroom: These millions must be very shrewd, very resourceful, to be able to get by in a society still wedded enough to the printed word to make illiteracy a handicap rather than an advantage. I wonder if they are the same people who never cross a classroom's threshold until they have mystically divined that it is time for the midterm or final-exam review.

Textbook: I admire them.

The West: Within reason—considering that the 21st century approaches, and the Age of Enlightenment is supposed to have already occurred—

Notes: *The Age of Enlightenment: 18th-century European philosophical movement characterized by rationalism, an impetus toward learning, and a spirit of skepticism and empiricism in social and political thought.*

The West: —within reason, admire them, certainly. But I begin to see. The fraction does leap off the page, doesn't it? One third are able to get by. That's a lot of people who don't need it.

Graduate: Yes. And such a smooth-running society! I'm laughing because I'm thinking that, as a nation, we still piously talk about education. After all this, we still sometimes think we want education reform. Does the shark learn to walk on land, when he thrives so in the water? The very universities which I daresay would be in the vanguard of any other nation's education-reform movement are themselves—how shall I put it?—

Classroom: Hurriedly cloaking what last glittering gems of Western culture they know they possess—

The West: —exactly—

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Graduate: And, worse, replacing them with easy, third-world earth-goddess stuff.

Textbook: Apparently to the students' relief and joy.

Graduate: Yes. "Back to basics" mouthed for the children every six months, as if it were a sweet silly child's dream, freshmen at university reading Hopi spider-goddess myths but not the Old Testament—

Notes: *Old Testament: Christian designation for the Holy Scriptures of Judaism, the first of the two general divisions of the Christian Bible (the second being the New Testament).*

Textbook: And we are not so very wedded to the printed word but that a third of us can still get by . . .

Graduate: School is a puzzling place. But you know, I think I learned a few things, I will not say at college, but from college.

Classroom: The most important thing you could possibly have learned would be that education now must be a matter of lone men and women reading quietly at night, preserving the *oempholoessa.*

Notes: *A Greek word, meaning "umbilical cord," referring to the intellectual legacy that the West has inherited from its past. See* Hamlet's Mill, *Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend.*

Graduate: Then let me say the most encouraging thing I learned was that professors do have a purpose, even if they cannot teach sensibly and slowly and are not allowed to give proper grades for fear of hurting people's feelings and bringing on lawsuits.

Textbook: Yes. They can at least be used as roving librarians—

Graduate: As the suggesters of good books.

Textbook: Yes.

The West: I agree.

Classroom: Hesiod, Sappho—

Notes: *Both Greek poets, of the 8th and 7th centuries* B.C.E., *respectively.*

Graduate: —Paine and Lincoln and Cather.

Notes: *Thomas Paine: English-born writer, patriot of the American Revolution, born 1737, died 1809. Abraham Lincoln: 1809 to 1865. American President, 1861 to 1865. Willa Cather: American novelist, 1873-1947.*

Classroom: I myself have seen interested students petition the professor after class, after the bored students have finished asking him what's going to be on the test, and I have seen him reveal to them alone—even though they are no better, or their parents any richer, than anyone else—a forest of books and a symphony of names. Euclid, Horace, Juvenal—

Notes: *Euclid: Greek mathematician, circa 300* B.C.E. *Horace, Juvenal: Roman poets of the 1st and 2nd centuries* C.E., *respectively.*

Classroom: —Newton, Racine, Sallust—

Notes: *Isaac Newton: English mathematician, philosopher, 1642 to 1727. Jean Baptiste Racine: French playwright, poet, 1639 to 1699. Sallust: Roman historian of the 1st century* B.C.E.

Graduate: Seneca, Galen, Terence, Hroswitha—

Notes: *Seneca: Roman philosopher, dramatist, statesman, 1st century* C.E. *Galen: Greek physician, writer, perhaps 130 to 200* C.E. *Terence: Roman writer, 2nd century* B.C.E. *Hroswitha: German nun, playwright, 10th century* C.E.

Textbook: Plotinus, Darwin, Hildegarde—

Notes: *Plotinus: Greek philosopher of the 3rd century* C.E. *Charles Darwin: English naturalist, 1809 to 1882. Hildegarde: German nun, mystic, writer, 1098 to 1179.*

The West: Ironic, is it not, that in this land where people prize equality for all, there should grow up in the universities these little outposts of elitism, willy-nilly, these little cliques of people who get something like a real education in tiny, exclusive, after-class schools-within-schools.

Classroom: Yes. We are faced with a paradox, as the bored students stream out of the room. Why should people be denied real learning, simply because they've shown that they don't care?

Textbook: Should real learning be forced down the throats of apathetic youth?

Classroom: The marching students are beginning to say, No, it should not.

Graduate: The most prestigious universities in the country are beginning to agree.

The West: But whereas the marching students say, "Western Civ has got to go"—

Graduate: And the university says, "All right, Western Civ has got to change"—

The West: —I say, it has got to be left alone, in the care of people who know what it is, and respect it.

Textbook: Quite true. If it cannot be forced upon all, then it should not be withheld from all or mutilated for all.

Graduate: Yes. I was confused at first, I'll admit, when I went to college, but now I understand, even to the last and simplest lesson of all, which is—

The West: May I guess?

Graduate: Please.

The West: Even though it's too bad when people forfeit a good thing they might have kept, they cannot be made to value what they do not value.

Graduate: Quite true.

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The Second Death of Leon Klinghoffer

Samuel Lipman

On October 7, 1985, the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro*, while on its way from Alexandria to Port Said, was hijacked by four Palestinian terrorists. The hijackers threatened to kill all the passengers on board unless their demand for the release of some 50 Palestinian prisoners in Israel were met. In the event, they did murder one passenger, the American Jew Leon Klinghoffer, a partially paralyzed stroke victim confined to a wheelchair and traveling with his wife; he was killed by two bullet shots and, while still in the wheelchair, his body was cast overboard.

Upon landing in Port Said, the hijackers were turned over to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (to a faction of which they belonged) and placed on a flight to Tunis, but the plane carrying them was intercepted by American fighters acting upon the orders of President Reagan, and forced to land in Italy. Ultimately, the hijackers plus an accomplice were convicted in an Italian court, and in the end eleven others were also charged in the murder of Klinghoffer, including several whose whereabouts remained unknown.

It is fair to say that the world was outraged at the wanton cruelty of this terrorist operation; but it is also fair to say that the outrage hardly served to confer a guilty verdict upon the cause in whose name the murder was committed. And yet as always in these matters, a residue of outrage did remain, and the Klinghoffer murder served as yet another blot on the moral pretensions of the Arab fight against Israel and the Jewish people. But what proved reasonably clear in world reaction appears to have remained obscure in the precincts of art, where would-be creative types see themselves as judges upon the human condition. Before only a year had passed after the *Achille Lauro* affair, the stage director Peter Sellars, the composer John Adams, and the poet Alice Goodman decided to make an opera of the hijacking. At the time this team—all of them Harvard-trained and so representative of what was once called our "best and brightest"—was riding the crest of its excitement in working on another opera based on a contemporary theme, *Nixon in China*, a deadpan and often caricaturized version (finally premiered in 1987) of the famous trip that restored Sino-American contacts after more than two decades of estrangement.

The result of their work on the *Achille Lauro* hijacking is *The Death of Klinghoffer*, a two-act opera that received its premiere in Brussels last March, and was shown several times at the Brooklyn Academy of Music this past September. In Europe it has already been presented in Lyons and Vienna; there is talk of doing it next year at Glyndebourne in England. In the United States it will be produced in San Francisco and Los Angeles. It will be recorded by Nonesuch, and it has already been broadcast by National Public Radio.

Of the three collaborators, only the librettist, Alice Goodman, is without much of a track record; her program credits, even now, include only the books for *Nixon* and *Klinghoffer*, and a translation of Mozart's *Magic Flute* for a 1991 Glyndebourne production. Of the other two collaborators, Sellars and Adams, the former is by far the better known.

Born in 1957, Sellars was already a provocative and controversial presence in student dramatic activity at Harvard, and has been the *enfant terrible* of American stagecraft since the late 1970's. A specialist in imposing his often outrageous directorial conceptions on classic operas, he has spent much time on those of Handel; in his 1981-82 staging of Handel's *Orlando* for the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, for example, the main character was transformed into an astronaut at Cape Canaveral. In the mid-1980's, he had a brief and unsuccessful tenure as head of the American National Theater Company at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. In the late 1980's his updated productions of Mozart operas at the Pepsico Summerfare Festival occasioned much favorable comment by those critics sympathetic to the theatrical and musical avant-garde, and were presented this past winter on PBS television, also to praise from similar sources.* *Nixon in China* was Sellars's idea, and in the resulting collaboration with Goodman and Adams, it was he who called the artistic shots.

As a composer, John Adams (born 1947) is now the youngest member of the quartet of minimalists that includes Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass.† The general phenomenon of minimalist music has been with us for some twenty years, and in its essence has involved, on the one hand, a retreat from the organized (and unorganized) dissonances associated with the 20th-century

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* For my own reaction to the Sellars television productions of Mozart, see "Sellars Trumps Mozart," in the *New Criterion*, April 1991.

† I discussed the rise of musical minimalism in "From Avant-Garde to Pop" (Commentary, July 1979, reprinted in my *The House of Music*, 1984).

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avant-garde, and, on the other, the reduction of music to its traditional consonantal and tonal elements, including scales, arpeggios, chords, and simple harmonies. Minimalism has also involved the unvaried repetition, often to a hitherto undreamed-of degree, of these traditional elements.

As a musical style minimalism has in recent years been thought to be particularly appropriate for opera, a form that has long seemed stultifyingly locked into music's past. *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), Glass's collaboration with director/designer Robert Wilson, marked both the debut of this operatic style and, to this date, its greatest success; several subsequent Glass operas, among them *Satyagraha* (1980) and *Akhnaten* (1984), have not generated anything like the interest of *Einstein*.

What Adams has brought to minimalism is a certain emphasis on sweeter-sounding harmonies and, on many occasions, melodic fragments growing out of these harmonies. As a result, Adams's music has always been marked by the grafting of what at least formally are melodies—moving lines meant to give lyrical pleasure—onto the stock *materia musica* that make up the minimalist bag of tricks.

By now, Adams has written several large-scale non-operatic works, including *Harmonium* (1980), *Grand Pianola Music* (1981-82), and *Harmonielehre* (1984-85). Though these works display significant sonic differences, they do share one unifying characteristic: a prevailingly static quality, a slowness of movement that verges upon the exploitation of the physical qualities of sounds and their combinations for their own sakes, rather than for any relation these sounds and combinations may have to one another and to the structure and direction of the composition as a whole.

Adams's most talked-about instrumental work is *Harmonielehre*, whose title was taken, one assumes consciously, from Arnold Schoenberg's harmony textbook of the same name (1911). Schoenberg's treatise was meant as a compendium of traditional harmonic practice; Adams's composition is little more than a compendium of the usual tiresome minimalist pulsating chords, mildly syncopated figurations, and juicily superficial melodies coming from nowhere and going nowhere. The overall musical effect of the *Harmonielehre* might be described as Vincent D'Indy without direction: a kind of ersatz late-19th-century French romanticism (deriving from the last operas of Wagner), self-indulgent in texture and melody, but always lacking the solid harmonic foundation so characteristic of traditionally trained 19th-century musicians.*

As is so often true of contemporary avant-garde music, the greatest interest lies in the explanatory material: the record-liner notes tell us that the second movement describes the wound of Anfortas, a hero of the medieval Grail romances (the name is given by Wagner in *Parsifal* as "Amfortas"), and the final movement describes an encounter between the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart and Adams's infant daughter Quackie, in which the baby whispers the secret of grace into the theologian's ear.

The two most recent large-scale orchestral works of Adams to be recorded are *Fearful Symmetries* (1988), an extended attempt to recreate the sound of the Ellington-swing-jazz world of the 1930's, and *The Wound-Dresser*, a setting for baritone of Walt Whitman's tragic poem (1865) about his stint as a nurse in the Civil War.† *Fearful Symmetries* sounds merely like a talented send-up of the style and manner of 1930's popular music; as is the case with Adams's relationship to the world of D'Indy's music, his evocation of the big-band world lacks the animating sense of purpose, both harmonic and melodic, that rendered the popular music of that era so distinctive. In *The Wound-Dresser*, Adams, once again returning to a turn-of-the-century French model, fails to connect the words and the music, not just in terms of meaning, but as a tonal whole. The result is a kind of quasi-poetic declamation occurring simultaneously with slowly-moving Debussyean impressionist harmonies and progressions.

It was, of course, *Nixon in China* that put Adams on the American compositional map; curiously, this was so even though it was his first opera, and bore every mark of Peter Sellars's autocratic control. Seen at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the production was distinguished more for pasteboard characterizations of Richard Nixon, his wife, and the various Chinese officials with whom he came in contact, than for any serious attempt to confront the larger-than-life personalities of the characters. Sadly, the most intriguing aspect of the production was also the most offensive: the presentation of Henry Kissinger, Nixon's Secretary of State, as a lumpish, often clearly menacing and altogether sinister figure, mostly silent but always evil in aspect. Indeed, Sellars's Kissinger bears an uncomfortable resemblance to what might have appeared in an illustrated anti-Semitic tract of the 1930's.

Despite all the wishful hyperbole that presented Adams as the great hope of American opera, it was immediately clear from the opening repeated scales, stuck in ponderous iterated chords and followed by simply harmonized and interminable choral declamation, and then by a long recitation from Nixon, that the contribution of his music to *Nixon in China* was meager. All Adams managed to do was to write a score in which the relationship of the music to the words, and to the events on stage, would be no more important or constitutive than that of music for modern dance, when that music is commissioned, as it almost always is, from minor composers.

As with such dance scores, what Adams produced here must be called incidental music, lacking independent existence as music and existing only in order to keep the mind of the viewer passively occu-

* For extraordinary examples of the beauties of this style in the hands of a major composer, I can recommend the Introduction to D'Indy's opera *Fervaal* (1889-95) and his Symphony no. 2 (1902-03). Unfortunately, neither work is currently available on CD.

† Both works are on Elektra/Nonesuch 9 79218-2.

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pied during the slow moments, or rather hours, on stage. At most, it can be said that in *Nixon* Adams achieved a pop catchiness, an upbeat finger-snapping quality, perhaps reminiscent of TV fast-food commercials. This catchiness, in the context of all the declamation from the singers, the deadpan expressions onstage, and the pointless choreography of Mark Morris, ended up making the whole effort an inadvertently mocking comment not just on opera or on American opera, but on an audience that would pay good money to see famous characters act on stage like flattened denizens of the downtown art scene.

The reaction to *Nixon in China* was predictable: those critics oriented toward "the cutting edge" found it a great leap forward; those critics who take their pleasure in traditional opera found the whole exercise foolish and somehow demeaning. For *Nixon*'s supporters, its great virtue was to bring opera into the present day, proving that it could be relevant and about real people, rather than just gods and goddesses, musty figures of myth and romance, or stock personages out of theatrical history.

No doubt it was an enticing idea to put a singing Richard Nixon into the position of paying homage to a Mao Zedong made wise by age and the accomplishing of a world-historical revolution; yet Mao, large as he may bulk in the fantasy life of many radicals in the West, is too associated with murder in the minds of his own people to be represented as a hero. In any case, so weak were the characterizations of all involved, in music, libretto, and stage direction, that the real problem of just how contemporary politics might be made into opera was somehow elided, and in fact quite disappeared.

FROM the relative safety of *Nixon in China* as a subject to the moral and political minefields surrounding the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* was quite a jump for the Sellars-Adams-Goodman team. Here was a confrontation, not as in *Nixon* between two superpowers and their two variously flawed leaders, but rather between terrorists and innocent civilians. Furthermore, the confrontation—coming at a moment when the Holocaust is still fresh in everyone's mind—issued in the face-to-face killing of a Jew *because* he was a Jew, and a crippled and unarmed Jew at that. If this inevitably made the wheelchair-bound Leon Klinghoffer into a kind of hero, not in his own right but because of the millions of kindred victims whose fate he symbolized, then his murderers could only be villains.

But of course no one, knowing anything of the mindset of the artistic "cutting-edge" of our time, would be so foolish as to think that a trendy opera could be written taking the side of an innocent Jew murdered by revolutionary Arabs. On the other hand, it is also clear that the need to get the work funded, produced, and attended—not to mention common decency—forbade any attempt to make real heroes out of Klinghoffer's killers. And so those responsible for *Klinghoffer* decided to treat the whole story as a matter of moral equivalence. One need look no further for evidence of this decision than the very title of the opera: *The Death of Klinghoffer*, rather than *The Murder of Klinghoffer*.

Accordingly, the opera starts with a Prologue containing a chorus of exiled Palestinians lamenting the destruction of their homes by the Israelis in 1948, followed by a group of middle-class American Jews discussing their own travels and the Klinghoffers' upcoming trip, and ending with a "Chorus of Exiled Jews"—who seem to be tourists to Israel—lamenting, *inter alia*, the loss of their luggage, the picketing of Israeli movie theaters by the ultra-religious, and the existence in the Jewish state of military barracks.

Act I proceeds to the beginnings of the hijacking, with contributions from the ship's Captain, a Swiss passenger, the ship's First Officer, the leader of the hijackers (who orders the separation of Americans, Israelis, and Britons from the rest of the passengers), two other hijackers, and an Austrian passenger; a closing chorus sententiously sums up everyone's discomfort. Act II opens with a "Chorus of Hagar and the Angel," about the birth of the Arab people. It then describes the behavior of the hijackers as they wait for orders from their shore-based commanders, orders which never arrive. Klinghoffer is wheeled away, and then, off-stage, shot and thrown into the sea. His wife finds out the news from the Captain, and as she mourns her husband, the opera ends with everyone singing a chorus of platitudes about the night and God.

IN CONSIDERING an opera, one usually begins with the music and goes on to the libretto and the relationship between it and the music; in considering an opera in performance, one adds the production as a constituent element to be evaluated. But given the primacy of Sellars in the collaboration with Adams and Goodman, one must, I suppose, start here with the production.

There was only one set for the whole evening, an assemblage of scaffolding meant, presumably, to represent the ladders, gangways, and decks of a ship. There were almost no props on stage, except for Klinghoffer's wheelchair, a walker used by another passenger, and two vulgar off-white overstuffed lounge chairs occupied in the Prologue by the Jewish friends of the Klinghoffers as they discuss the gewgaws they have brought back from their own trips. I should add, too, that the hijackers carried submachine guns.

The intoned speeches of the hijackers, picked up by small video cameras, were shown to the audience on huge screens; all the sung words were also both electronically amplified and displayed as surtitles on a screen at the left top of the proscenium arch. The singers, all with no more than adequate voices, uniformly wore vacant expressions, and this impression of characterlessness was only reinforced by the fact that some of them took more than one role, as when two of the Klinghoffers' Jewish friends back home turn up later as hijackers.

Such action as there was involved scurrying up and down the scaf-

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folding, and equally aimless walking to and fro on the stage. Perhaps just because there was so little real action related to the subject of the opera itself, a lot of time was given over to dance, choreographed by Mark Morris. Here were all the clichés of late-modern and post-modern dance: the alternate walking and running, the arms swung from the shoulders at knee and foot level, much flapping of hands, and plenty of random bows and kicks. The costumes were plainness itself, as was most of the lighting, with the exception of a rather nice Christmas-tree twinkling effect on the scaffolding toward the opera's end. The much-talked-about dropping from the flies of a dancer tied to a rope, evidently meant to symbolize the dead Klinghoffer cast into the sea, came across as an artificial gimmick—Peter Pan, as it were, from Tribeca.

It is difficult to say very much about the language, qua language, of the libretto. Goodman clearly aimed at giving all the characters one kind of speech, albeit not one kind of statement. Only the opening conversation of the Klinghoffers' friends (no doubt intended to show the consumerist materialism of such types), Klinghoffer's own use of the word "shit" in describing the Arabs, and Mrs. Klinghoffer's complaints at one point about bodily aches and pains, lowered the tone from the otherwise omnipresent middlebrow highmindedness. Infelicities of diction abounded, as when the Captain, attempting to bring matters to a peaceful conclusion, says that in the absence of a dialogue, "Evil grows exponentially. . ."; or when, in getting up his nerve to tell Mrs. Klinghoffer of the death of her husband, he tells her, ". . . You are a very brave/Woman. A rara avis."

And then there was John Adams's music. As *Klinghoffer* makes clear, he has a very limited number of musical tools—four, to be exact—at his disposal. He can write languorous harmonies, as he does in setting the opening chorus of exiled Palestinians; he can write what seem like traditional melodies in everything save their inability to stick in the mind of the listener; he can write acre upon acre of repeated figurations, as he does so often to accompany the incessant recitative passages; and he can write glittery minimalist sections, full of syncopations and much assisted by the sound of synthesizers, as he does whenever (I suspect) he feels that the languor and the figurations have gone on too long. His vocal lines are usually undoubled in the orchestra, and usually unrelated as well to anything the orchestra is playing; the total effect thus is not one of singing, but of *parlando*, the quasi-toneless speaking of what ought to be musical lines.

The verdict, then, on Adams's music, in *The Death of Klinghoffer* no less than in the earlier *Nixon in China*, is that it is at best utilitarian, a means of occupying the aural space, just as the stage production and the dancing occupy the visual space. I suppose it must be admitted that these works are indeed multimedia productions, but in quite a different sense from that in which the term is mostly used: the rule the Sellars-Adams-Goodman team appears to follow is that if one cannot do one thing artistically well, one ought to do lots of things.

THE future for minimalist opera, as for minimalist music in general, hardly seems bright. Where the work of Glass, and now Adams, has signally failed is in its inability to connect music to the sung text and by so doing to project and delineate character. At most minimalism is able to communicate a single mood, one paradoxically combining restless boredom and febrile agitation. And beyond this ultimately fatal artistic lack lies a failure even more basic: the inability of minimalist music to stand on its own *as* music. There can be little doubt that it has proven a fundamental mistake to assume that the content of music lies in its basic elements of harmony, melody, and rhythm, rather than in their complete integration in a total system; Western music is just such a system, built out of basic elements, but gaining its genius from their combination, not from their isolation.

The question remains as to the viability of opera on highly visible contemporary subjects. It is difficult to decide this issue one way or the other without the example of such an opera produced by artists of high and memorable talent. Clearly, there are important advantages for artists in choosing operatic subjects on which it is possible to gain distance. Mythological subjects, historical subjects, stock characters of theatrical practice—all of these, though now derided by the trendy, provide composers and librettists with room in which to move: the artist need not take sides, or if he does, the question becomes not which side he takes, but how he takes the side he does. By contrast, contemporary subjects, because of their immediacy, inescapably compel artists and audiences alike to take sides, and simple sides at that. Where *Klinghoffer* is concerned, the pretense of not taking sides, of "even-handedness," is just that—a pretense. For in treating the murder of Klinghoffer as a "death," and in viewing the incident through the lens of moral equivalence, the opera for all practical purposes endorses the claims of the Palestinian assassins.

Still, the nature of opera as a form is so fluid, so difficult to define, that one would be rash to exclude any subject for operatic treatment. It is also true that an offensive treatment of a subject—the German nationalism and implicit anti-Semitism of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, for example—may be great art but nevertheless remain morally objectionable.

But *The Death of Klinghoffer* is hardly great art. Adams does not give the story musical expression of the stature necessary to carry it—and much the same can be said of the libretto and the stage production. So the verdict on contemporary operatic subjects must remain open. What is hardly open to dispute, however, is that poor Leon Klinghoffer, murdered first in life, has now been killed for a second time in art.

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Hollywood's Holy Grail

Richard Grenier

Hollywood has not only made a movie about the legendary medieval Fisher King, ruler of T.S. Eliot's bleak, desolate *Waste Land*, it has brazenly entitled it *The Fisher King*, thus inviting comparison with one of the major literary works of the 20th century and by inference with some of the greatest achievements of the religious spirit. Robin Williams and Jeff Bridges, the film's stars, may not normally be thought of as much concerned with medieval legends of the Holy Grail, but Terry Gilliam, the film's director, has said of the cinema, "The medium is so powerful that it should be used for enlightenment." He adds with little reticence that his *Fisher King* is about "love, understanding, and redemption." This message was received with apparent enthusiasm by the jury of the Venice Film Festival, which bestowed on the movie a major award. But since the title is only feebly accounted for in the film, and no one in the movie even comes near a fish, many filmgoers will have only the haziest notion of who the Fisher King is.

In the film, the character played by Robin Williams, an insane but lovable street person and former professor of medieval history at New York's Hunter College named Henry Sagan, has written a manuscript, *The Fisher King, A Mythic Journey for Modern Man*. We are not given details of this learned work, but later, in dialogue, Sagan recounts his version of the tale, according to which the Fisher King has a vision and is told he is to be keeper of the Holy Grail—the chalice from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper—"so that it shall heal the hearts of men." The King falls on evil times, receives a deep wound, loses faith, even in himself, and begins to die. Whereupon a boy, a "fool," gives him water to drink. The Fisher King's wound is instantly healed and he sees the Holy Grail. When the King asks the boy how he was able to cure him when all his wise men could not, the boy explains, "I only knew that you were thirsty." We have here, obviously, a thoroughly secularized version of the Grail legend. Its key is compassion. If the hearts of men were only compassionate again, all would be well.

In the varying but ubiquitous medieval legend of the quest for the Holy Grail, the Fisher King rules over a Waste Land which lies barren, because of some grievous wrong which can only be righted by an innocent and sometimes reluctant hero—Galahad in some versions, Percival in others. According to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*—acknowledged by T.S. Eliot as source of the title, plan, and much of the symbolism of his *The Waste Land*—the deeply symbolic Fisher King, sometimes old, sometimes dead, sometimes merely wounded, is a creature "semi-divine, semi-human, standing between his people and land and the unseen forces which control their destiny."

Jessie L. Weston, it should be noted, and with her T.S. Eliot, finds the origin of the Holy Grail cult not in Christianity but in ancient pre-Christian fertility rites. She dismisses those early writers, such as Chrétien de Troyes (12th century) and Wolfram von Eschenbach (13th century, from whose work Wagner drew his Percival or *Parsifal*), who thought the Fisher King owed his name to a fondness for fishing. Joining Sir James Frazer of *The Golden Bough*, Weston identifies "the Fish" (she capitalizes) as a widespread symbol of life among ancient peoples. In Hinduism, the first Avatar of Vishnu the Creator is a fish. The Fish and Fisher are employed freely in Buddhism as throughout Chinese history. The Babylonians had a Fisher god or Fish god. Early Christians, some writers have maintained, derived their Fish imagery from the Hebrews, who in turn borrowed it from the Syrians and Sumerians. According to one Jewish "fish" tradition, at the end of the world the messiah will catch the great Fish Leviathan and divide its flesh as food among the faithful.

Fish and Fisher, in sum, are life symbols of great antiquity. In the bleak, twilight city of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the poet evokes, in contrast to the modern world's spiritual desolation, a multitude of crumbling shards from the cultural and religious past, among them preeminently the ancient and powerful symbols of Fish and Fisher. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." All its other merits aside, *The Waste Land* displays an imposingly erudite familiarity with the history and meaning of those "fragments."

It is an ancient tradition of Hollywood to avoid such erudition like the plague. It is also true that for years the Hollywood film-making community has been going "upmarket," that it has grandiose ambitions and presumes to possess solutions to many of the ills that afflict humankind. But *The Fisher King* marks some kind of turning point. This is no longer the New Hollywood. It is post-New Hollywood, Hollywood gone intellectually ballistic.

Nor is *The Fisher King* alone

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this season. Another new movie, *Barton Fink*, awarded three top prizes at the other high-prestige film festival, at Cannes, also far transcends the line of intellectual pretension previously thought permissible in Hollywood. But first, *The Fisher King*.

Jack (Jeff Bridges) is an arrogant, irresponsible, wildly successful New York radio talk-show host. In the opening sequences of the movie Jack is clearly intended to represent everything that is selfish, insensitive, and "greedy" about modern America. Before signing off one morning, he displays his habitual heartlessness in his response to a repeat caller named Edwin. Edwin will never get the woman he's seen at a "yuppie watering hole" and fallen in love with, Jack says. Yuppies inbreed, only mate with their own kind. This isn't the America you and I believe in, Edwin, says Jack. And then, although it does not exactly follow or make much sense, Jack throws in a callous closing line: yuppies "must be stopped before it's too late!" Edwin, the caller, in the depths of despair, goes to the yuppie watering hole in question and shoots to death seven people, then turns his shotgun on himself. On this epiphanic incident, caused by selfish, irresponsible, unfeeling Jack, the whole movie depends.

Here *The Fisher King* jumps ahead three years. Jack has dropped out of his glittery career with a thud. Still arrogant, now he is drunken, indolent, surly, living in a shabby New York neighborhood with loving, long-suffering Anne (Mercedes Ruehl), who runs a small video-rental store. Jack is presumably repentant, corroded by guilt, although his behavior is not noticeably more generous or concerned than when he was the king of New York's radio call-in shows—until he encounters a strange and wonderful street person, Henry Sagan, now going under the name of Parry (Robin Williams). Parry, who sees the city "through the eyes of a medieval knight," is the movie's Fisher King, and Jack turns out to be its Galahad. Parry is Jack's salvation.

Now this is original, because traditionally it is Galahad who is supposed to cure the Fisher King and not the other way around. What is the Fisher King—usually wounded, dead, or unhealthy—doing curing Galahad of *his* wound? And the plot thickens. It seems that Parry, although a "visionary street person," is no happy hobo. He is insane. So, in this American version, Galahad and the Fisher King are both wounded—America, I gather, being a pretty sick place. And the plot thickens even more. Why is Parry insane? He is insane because, under the name of Henry Sagan, he saw his beautiful young wife murdered—by Edwin, the very same despairing caller driven to kill yuppies by callous radio call-in host Jack! So, in this modern American version, Galahad wounds the Fisher King before the Fisher King cures Galahad—and then Galahad cures the Fisher King. We wallow here in cures.

As HE learns from Parry the meaning of life and true love, Jack becomes a good egg, or a much better egg. Parry teaches Jack how to take off all his clothes in Central Park at night and "cloud bust," lying naked in the grass staring up at the heavens. Jack in turn begins an elaborate compensatory undertaking to bring Parry together with the girl of his dreams, Lydia (Amanda Plummer), something of a Woody Allen in drag yet even more of a klutz. (Miss Plummer, Robin Williams, Jeff Bridges, and Mercedes Ruehl all turn in vivid, inventive performances.) All is more or less well until Parry, on the verge of great happiness with Lydia, has a flashback to that horrible moment when his wife was murdered and he falls into a catatonic state.

Jack, successful again, becomes arrogant and greedy as of yore, heartlessly abandoning Anne, who has lovingly stuck by him during his bad years—until a producer proposes to make a light-hearted weekly television comedy inspired by Jack's adventures with the homeless. This, and a chance encounter with another street person we have met earlier in the story, a homosexual drag queen with friends dying of AIDS, makes Jack recoil in disgust from television's venal, exploitative proposal. He realizes at last that his heart is with the street people and the homeless, the insulted and injured of our society. As proof of his moral renewal, this Galahad for Our Time rejects the sordid television offer and decides to stay with loving, earthy Anne.

At this point the movie again picks up the Grail story. It seems that Parry, convinced he was on the track of the Holy Grail, had shown Jack a magazine picture of a trophy in the possession of a very rich old man living in a castle on Fifth Avenue. Jack, assuming his Galahad persona, now scales the castle wall at night, enters the Chapel Perilous, and makes off with the object. The trophy is in fact inscribed: TO LONNIE CARMICHAEL, FOR HIS WORK IN THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT, 1932, P.S. 247. But Parry does not know this and is now catatonic anyway. Yet Jack's act of love and devotion magically brings Parry back to life: he leads his fellow happy lunatics in the psychiatric ward in a spirited chorus of "I love New York in June. How about you?" In the movie's final scene, Jack and Parry lie peacefully naked at night in Central Park, "cloud busting."

In the last act of Wagner's *Parsifal*, the keeper of the Grail baptizes the beautiful, wicked, but repentant Kundry, exhorting her to trust in God. He sings of the country's beauty: "How fair the field and meadows." It is Good Friday and the bells call the Knights of the Grail to prayer. In Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Galahad dies after a vision in which he receives the holy sacrament. But in our thoroughly modern movie there is none of this religious claptrap. What we have, instead, is a welfare-state version of the quest for the Holy Grail. Can the modern Fisher King, lying wounded in this barren, infertile land, be cured by welfare reform? Are Robin Williams, Jeff Bridges, director Terry Gilliam, and Tri-Star Pictures, producers of *The Fisher King*, destined to begin the process of spiritual renewal? Who can say?

Barton Fink is not the story of a Jewish Galahad. Created by Joel

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and Ethan Coen, scripted by the two brothers working as a team, directed by Joel, produced by Ethan, *Barton Fink* is the first movie in the history of the Cannes Film Festival to win three top awards (best film, best director, best leading actor, John Turturro). With *The Fisher King* sharing the Silver Lion at Venice, it makes an impressive one-two for the new highbrow Hollywood.

Barton Fink was conceived while the Coen brothers were stricken with writer's block during the creation of *Miller's Crossing*, an ambitious and critically well-received evocation of the Chicago gangland of the 1920's. Like *Miller's Crossing*, *Barton Fink* is visually striking, unusually well cast, and oddly stylized. The Chicago mobsters of *Miller's Crossing* are mythic characters whose behavior at several points makes no sense at all, and the Hollywood denizens of *Barton Fink* are equally mythic, derived in several cases from historical characters who were rather larger than life to begin with.

Yet the Coen brothers deny that they set out to make a film about Hollywood, new or old. "We started," the brothers say, "with the idea of a big seedy hotel with John Turturro [much praised for his roles in films by Spike Lee] and John Goodman [best known for playing Roseanne Barr's husband on television's *Roseanne*]. We'd been reading a little bit about that period in Hollywood and it seemed like an amusing idea to have John Turturro as a playwright in Hollywood at that time [1941]." In early conversations, the name of Clifford Odets kept coming up, so Turturro read books about Odets and the Group Theater, and also Michael Gold's 1930 novel about the Lower East Side, *Jews Without Money*, and off they went.

For a movie in which the Coen brothers say Hollywood is a "secondary issue," "almost the cheapest part," and "not really what we were interested in," *Barton Fink* overflows with Hollywood icons and folklore. We have baroque versions of not only Clifford Odets, but MGM's Louis B. Mayer (Michael Lerner), a quintessential period film producer (Tony Shalhoub), the novelist William Faulkner during one of his filmland stints (John Mahoney), and a lady presented as Faulkner's mistress (Australia's Judy Davis from *Impromptu*). We see the old Ambassador Hotel, the old MGM lot, Culver City, eyeglasses inspired by Louis B. Mayer's, a hairdo inspired by George S. Kaufman's, a colonel's uniform made by the actual tailor who made one at the outbreak of World War II for Jack Warner. Larger than life, *Barton Fink* is also cruder than life. But if Terry Gilliam, director of *The Fisher King*, says he finds Hollywood "cynical," "awful," and "intimidating," the Coen brothers do not seem intimidated at all.

Barton Fink opens with the Broadway triumph of Barton Fink's *Bare Ruined Choirs*, a play about Fulton Street fishmongers (and a parody of Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing!*). "Cast iron wind. . . I'm awake for the first time in years! . . . My eyes are open now!. . . Let them sing their hearts out!. . . We'll hear from that kid, and I don't mean a postcard." The Coen brothers consider their film a comedy, and their Barton Fink tells us lugubriously that he is the playwright of the "common man," writing from "deep inner pain to ease the suffering of my fellow man," the "average working stiff," "the masses." Anguished, Barton Fink asks why the hopes and dreams of this common man should move us less than those of kings.

Signed up by one of the major film studios, Fink checks into a dilapidated, ghostly Los Angeles hotel that seems to have been inspired by the Eagles' eerie rock hit, *Hotel California* ("Welcome to the Hotel California. . . . You can check out any time you like/But you can never leave"). Actual screenwriters of the *Barton Fink* period, including Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, and Nathanael West, slaved away in little studio cubicles, but Barton Fink, assigned to a Wallace Beery wrestling movie, is allowed to stay home in his rundown hotel, and there (like the Coen brothers) he gets a grand case of writer's block. He starts out: "Scene: A tenement building on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Faint traffic noise is audible." He comes to a terrible halt. The next day he adds: ". . . as are the cries of fishmongers."

Down the hall is a friendly, hearty traveling insurance salesman, a common man if ever there was one, Charlie Meadows (John Goodman), just dying to tell stories. Meadows says again and again, "I could tell you stories. . . ." These are tales which our blocked screenwriter desperately needs, but Fink always interrupts Meadows to rhapsodize on the theme of the writer's mission to serve the common man. Self-absorbed, Fink cannot listen.

His encounters with the studio brass are bizarre but quite funny; the film's most remarkable performance is by Michael Lerner as a combination of Louis B. Mayer and Columbia's Harry Cohn:

> Is that Barton Fink? Let me put my arms around this guy! The writer is king at Capital Pictures! We need more heart in the movies! The poetry of the streets! We want that Barton Fink feeling! The hopes and dreams of this wrestler! A romantic interest? Is Wally too old for a romantic interest? Is he an orphan maybe? Which is it, Bart? Orphan? Dame? I'm bigger, meaner, and louder than any other kike in this town! End of the week, Bart. We're all expecting great things.

Fink's encounters with the William Faulkner character are rather less entertaining. Timid, plain, no hand with the ladies, Barton Fink somehow manages to go to bed with Faulkner's mistress, and during their night together the camera does strange things. It dollies over to the hotel room's washbowl and goes down the drain—down, down, down—through the plumbing. After which *Barton Fink* becomes a different movie.

Is this *Barton Fink Through the Washbowl Plumbing* intended to be the Hollywood nether world? Is it a dream? The movie, from the time Fink arrives in Hollywood, has never been realistic. The vast and ghostly Hotel Earle has only two specter-like employees, and Fink and Charlie Meadows are its

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only guests. But when our blocked screenwriter wakes up in the morning post-plumbing, there is a sharp break. In a panic, Fink sees a flood of blood oozing from the lady he went to bed with, who is quite dead. Charlie Meadows disposes of the body for him. Fink has a story conference with the Louis B. Mayer-like studio mogul and finds him grotesque—although since the mogul was already rather grotesque the change here is less obvious than waking to find one's bedmate dead. Back at the Hotel Earle, two hard-bitten (and anti-Semitic) detectives tell Fink that Charlie Meadows, now missing, is no likable traveling salesman after all but a serial killer, "Mad Man Mundt."

In a burst, Fink finally writes a screenplay about a wrestling fishmonger, ending with the charged words, "We'll hear from that wrestler again, and I don't mean a postcard!" Our studio mogul rages at Fink for writing "a fruity movie about suffering" and announces he is going to keep him under contract but never produce any of his scripts (purgatory). And then Charlie Meadows, a/k/a Mad Man Mundt, returns. In the corridors of the Hotel Earle, ablaze with metaphoric hellfire, he guns down the police detectives, screaming, "I'll give you the life of the mind!" We never, in fact, emerge from the washbowl plumbing.

WHAT does it all mean? Since, according to the Coen brothers, Hollywood was not what they were really interested in, the true subject of the movie, still according to the Coen brothers, can only be the relationship between the common man's playwright, Barton Fink, and a genuine common man, Charlie Meadows. Here the sanctimonious show-business leftism of the 1930's and 1940's is clearly being satirized. Written as it was by two blocked writers, *Barton Fink* seems, also, to be about the creative process. But why the blood? Why turn a gregarious, good-humored insurance salesman into a serial killer? Are these arbitrary plot devices supposed to deepen the audience's perception of "reality"?

The Coen brothers are far more guarded about their movie's meaning than was T.S. Eliot about *The Waste Land,* and no film critics I have read seem even to have noticed the through-the-washbowl-plumbing shot or the sharp change in register the shot marks. Some reviewers have merely labeled the film's ending "obscure." But it really does appear that everything after the plumbing—the bedmate dead, Charlie Meadows a serial killer, the hotel ablaze, the studio mogul threatening—is indeed a Barton Fink nightmare. It is admittedly an extensive and elaborate nightmare, taking as it does 45 minutes in a two-hour movie. But it hardly makes a satisfactory end for such a film, and it is not very funny. Which is unfortunate, because the early parts of *Barton Fink* show real talent.

WHEN Lewis Carroll sent his Alice through the looking glass she found a droll, ironic world, still entertaining to us today. When the Coen brothers send Barton Fink through the plumbing of his seedy Los Angeles hotel, he finds flames, lurid violence. Does Barton Fink's nightmare tells us anything interesting about the creative process, Hollywood, or even Barton Fink? In *The Fisher King,* director Terry Gilliam, responsible for the amusing and imaginative animation sequences in British television's *Monty Python* series and for a number of increasingly ambitious movies (*Jabberwocky, Time Bandits, Brazil, The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*), similarly goes overboard when he pursues deep meaning.

But nowadays—witness the awards for both the Coen brothers and Gilliam—film-festival juries are really wowed by deep meaning.

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Books in Review

Trial and Triumph

THE KIRKPATRICK MISSION: DIPLOMACY WITHOUT APOLOGY. AMERICA AT THE UNITED NATIONS, 1981-1985. By ALLAN GERSON. *The Free Press. 317 pp. $22.95.*

Reviewed by ARCH PUDDINGTON

ALTHOUGH many now consider the United Nations a crucial instrument for the fashioning of a post-Communist world order, it was not so long ago that American diplomats regarded service at the UN as an assignment in hell. It was bad enough that the United States was routinely denounced as a bastion of racism, colonialism, and imperialism; that Israel was excoriated, often in racialist vocabulary, by the representatives of mass murderers; that the Soviet Union's misdeeds were practically immune from sanction; that the issue of democracy was effectively shunted aside in favor of one new world order or another to legitimize state control of the media, economic affairs, culture, and on and on in a seemingly endless list.

Bad as all this was, what was equally frustrating was the arrant hypocrisy which pervaded UN affairs, particularly during the period of American global decline from roughly 1968 to 1980. In his account of Jeane Kirkpatrick's tenure as U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Allan Gerson recounts several instances of delegates loudly assailing America on one day and on the next day privately explaining that they really had not meant what they said. Thus a member of the Egyptian delegation told an amazed Gerson (himself a member of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's staff) that America should not take at face value his country's pointed criticisms of the 1983 invasion of Grenada:

> Of course we didn't mean [what we said]. We know the United States did what it had to do. We are glad of it. After all, the United States is a great power. We know you can't afford another Nicaragua down there, not after the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. How would it look if you, a great power, were now to run away again after being asked for help by the neighboring countries?

Where previous U.S. diplomats had grudgingly accepted the UN's cynical code of conduct (and in the case of Jimmy Carter's Ambassador, Andrew Young, actually encouraged some of that body's most deplorable tendencies), Mrs. Kirkpatrick from the outset charted a course of resistance. A respected academic with longstanding ties to the Humphrey-Jackson wing of the Democratic party, she had come to the notice of then-candidate Ronald Reagan through her November 1979 essay in COMMENTARY, "Dictatorships and Double Standards." Her insistence there that totalitarian regimes posed a much greater danger to American interests than did the more traditional dictatorships was in fact to provide an intellectual premise for the Reagan administration's foreign policy.

Gerson's account helps explain why the Kirkpatrick appointment, at the time a source of high controversy, ultimately proved one of Reagan's smartest moves. There was, to begin with, Mrs. Kirkpatrick's personal qualities: an impressive and wide-ranging intellect, a penchant for truth-telling in political debate, and a moral revulsion at the contempt for democracy and hostility toward America which set the tone for UN debates at the beginning of her tenure. Widely reviled as a dangerous cold-war ideologue, Mrs. Kirkpatrick approached the issues on the UN agenda with a combination of strong conviction, scholarly thoroughness, and, when necessary, a surprising talent for polemics. She also had the benefit of a hand-picked, first-rate staff, young men like Carl Gershman (now president of the National Endowment for Democracy) and Kenneth Adelman (who went on to head the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and is now a syndicated columnist).

The obstacles facing Mrs. Kirkpatrick were not exclusively attributable to the Soviets or to third-world radicals; some had their origins in American politics. She ranked, after all, among a small group of former Democrats (Richard Perle and Elliott Abrams also figured prominently on this list) who had joined the Reagan administration because of its declared willingness to counter Soviet global aggression and because of the Democrats' confusion over America's world role. All these officials were treated with particular vindictiveness by the liberal foreign-policy establishment, perhaps less because of their having changed parties than because of their enthusiasm and effectiveness in promoting the anti-Communist goals which Reagan had emphasized during his presidential campaign. Where Mrs. Kirkpatrick was concerned, the result was a relentless campaign in the press in which she was variously labeled an amateur, a dangerous hard-liner, and someone who tried to advance her own agenda over policies laid down by the State Department. Her imminent departure from the UN post was widely predicted and eagerly anticipated.

A further complication was the prevailing attitudes of the career officials at the State Department and even within the UN mission. Many of these officials looked on Mrs. Kirkpatrick and her team as inexperienced outsiders who failed to grasp certain realities; these realities included a posture of acceptance toward the Palestine Liberation Organization. This became all too obvious early on in Mrs. Kirkpatrick's stint during a controversy over the deportation of Abu Eain, a Palestinian accused by Israel of

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having set off a bomb which killed two children and wounded 36 others. Abu Eain had slipped out of Israel, found his way to Chicago, been apprehended by U.S. authorities, and had emerged as something of an international *cause célèbre* as his extradition case wound its way through the court system.

When Abu Eain was eventually sent to Israel, a majority was pieced together at the UN to endorse a resolution attacking the American legal system and justifying "all available means" in the fight against "colonialism" and "alien" rule—in other words, rationalizing terrorism. Incredibly enough, many in the State Department had actually opposed Israel's extradition request, fearing an outbreak of terrorist acts against American targets and further complications in the Middle East "peace process." As for Mrs. Kirkpatrick, however, the Abu Eain incident reinforced her determination to make clear her unwillingness to conduct business as usual.

Thus when a number of nations deemed friendly by our government signed a communiqué issued by the Nonaligned Movement and sharply attacking the United States, the Ambassador wrote pointed notes asking for an explanation. Surprisingly, a number of governments did respond, apologizing for the contents of the manifesto but rationalizing their signatures on the grounds that previous U.S. administrations had never bothered to read such communiqués, much less protest their contents.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick also differed with the State Department over how to explain to the world the reasons for the U.S. invasion of Grenada. This issue was of considerable practical importance since it was her job to defend the Grenada action at the UN against the predictable resolutions of condemnation. Mrs. Kirkpatrick preferred an honest approach, stressing the fears provoked by Grenada's radical leaders throughout the Caribbean region and the plain fact that the United States was opposed to the establishment of another Cuba in the hemisphere. The State Department, however, insisted that the UN delegates focus exclusively on the question of self-defense, that is, fears for the safety of the American medical students trapped in Grenada during the bloodletting which followed the toppling of Maurice Bishop. The State Department, of course, prevailed, with the result that America looked doubly foolish: the explanations of self-defense fooled no one, and our limited approach swayed no votes at the UN.

As Gerson notes, the disagreement over the most effective way to interpret Grenada carried implications beyond that particular crisis. The differences between Mrs. Kirkpatrick and the professional diplomatic corps were at heart dictated by conflicting attitudes toward the Reagan Doctrine, the notion that the United States had the right to support anti-Communist insurgencies throughout the third world in order to liberate societies from Communist domination and contain or even roll back Soviet influence. Many in the State Department, Gerson reports, regarded the Reagan Doctrine as an embarrassment, the moral equivalent of Soviet assistance to Fidel Castro and

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the Sandinistas. This was precisely the kind of mirror-imaging that Mrs. Kirkpatrick found insufferable. She not only supported the Reagan Doctrine—indeed, one of her great contributions was her belief in the morality of America's judicious use of force—she helped define it through her writings on the totalitarian challenge.

DISMISSED by critics as an amateur, Mrs. Kirkpatrick actually carved a record of substantial diplomatic achievement at the UN, measured by a turnaround in America's fortunes there during her four-year tenure. Gerson provides interesting details about the key events of that tenure, and his accounts of the conflicts between Mrs. Kirkpatrick and other American officials are especially important to any understanding of the problems confronting the entire Reagan foreign-policy experience. It is a pity that his book does not adequately convey the intensity and drama of the various battles which marked Mrs. Kirkpatrick's years at the UN—one would have preferred more of her own voice (some of her speeches, and those of her deputies, were models of intelligent anti-totalitarian rhetoric) and less detail about international law, which happens to be the author's special field. But on the whole, *The Kirkpatrick Mission* is a worthy account of an important and even inspirational chapter in recent American foreign policy.

Against Foreign Aid

THE DEVELOPMENT FRONTIER: ESSAYS IN APPLIED ECONOMICS. By PETER BAUER. *Harvard University Press. 241 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by IRWIN M. STELZER

TO anyone already familiar with Peter Bauer's influential books and essays (including in COMMENTARY), there will not be much that is startlingly new in this volume. We have here Bauer's attacks on the literature of economic development, his assaults on the Malthusians who see population growth as an unmitigated disaster for less-developed countries (LDC's), and his derisive attitude toward the efficacy of so-called "foreign aid."

But that is not to say this work by the distinguished British economist can safely be passed over. It cannot, if only because some of its most important propositions, though perhaps not so controversial as they once were, nevertheless have yet to sink into the consciousness of policy-makers. Bauer's brain-clearing strictures on foreign-aid programs are a major case in point.

The recipients of these huge transfers of funds, Bauer stresses, "are always governments. They are not the poor, destitute, or starving people shown in aid propaganda." This would be a trivial point were it the case that the governments of poorer countries act as conduits to their unfortunate subjects. Not so, shows Bauer, with example upon example of the fallacy of a "facile identification of governments with the population at large." The wonder is that we—or, more precisely, aid proponents—need reminding of this fact in a world in which Johnny Walker is the drink of choice in Iraqi ministries while Saddam Hussein seeks international aid for starving, disease-ridden Iraqi children.

The wonder, too, is that we should have gone so far down the path toward a massive aid program to the Soviet Union's central regime without first considering Bauer's warning that such aid increases the power of governments over their people, and defers market-based reforms. Equally important, says Bauer, is that such aid will have the counterproductive effect of inhibiting the development of an entrepreneurial trader class, the only rock on which an advancing economy can be built.

My summary of these points may suggest that Bauer indulges merely in sweeping generalizations. True, he sometimes seems to do so. But the categorical nature of Bauer's conclusions, his apparent preference for a chisel and tablets over pen and paper, mislead. Bauer is an empiricist, or at least a skilled anecdotalist, building his work from the bottom up—studying the cocoa and palm-oil markets in Nigeria, the pattern of groundnut buying in that country, the effect of low labor costs on Southeast Asia's rubber-growing industry and on Hong Kong. This is consistent with his injunction, set down in a chapter criticizing Sir John Hicks's *A Theory of Economic History*: "Construction of a general theory of history to cover all ages and all mankind is a will-o'-the-wisp. It generally diverts attention . . . from . . . the patient . . . methodical examination at some depth of evidence drawn from the actual record of history."

ONE can naturally quarrel with a number of the points made in these seventeen essays. Thus, it is not as certain as Bauer would have it that population growth in LDC's is always the result of conscious choice by parents fully aware of contraception devices but eager to have children. Or that the willingness of people in LDC's to plant slow-maturing trees is convincing evidence of their "readiness to take the long view." But that is part of Bauer's charm: his ability to play the provocateur without descending to the level of gadfly. And, in broad, he has been proven right.

He has been proven right preeminently—to repeat—on the subject of foreign aid. For although we know somewhat less than we would like to know, and much less than development economists think they know, about what causes the process of development to take off, we do know that aid does not. Consider the fact that between 1950 and 1989, real income per capita rose at an annual rate of 3.6 percent in Asia, which received little aid; at 1.2 percent in Latin America, which received some; and at 0.8 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, which received lots.

Bauer has been proven right, too, in emphasizing that disparities in rates of economic development are explained more by government policies than by aid flows. According to a new World Bank study (*World Development Report*, Ox-

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ford University Press, 1991), governments that rely on markets, not ministers, to set prices; that avoid manipulating exchange rates; and that concentrate their efforts on education and preserving a stable macroeconomy will preside over flourishing economies. Those that rely on aid-infested, command-and-control economies will not. Score another one for Peter Bauer.

Through a Lens, Darkly

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONIES: THE RUINS OF MEMORY. By LAWRENCE L. LANGER. *Yale University Press. 216 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by DAVID G. ROSKIES

SOMEONE comes with a story to tell—how, alone of all his family, friends, and townspeople, he survived the Nazi Holocaust. So you put him in a bare room, and sit him down in front of a video camera, and a stranger asks him questions in English to which he replies with a heavy accent. Lawrence L. Langer, in his recent study of *Holocaust Testimonies*, argues that such interviews are the ultimate source of truth. They are truer than the written word, even by the same person, because they lay bare the self-censoring tricks that memory plays.

After viewing hundreds of videotapes housed at the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, Langer has drawn a map to describe the intricate byways of Holocaust memory. He provides the following five headings: Deep Memory reveals the "buried self" as it was then, without the support of memories from before or after Auschwitz; Anguished Memory recalls the futile dialogue within the self of the insider vs. the outsider; Humiliated Memory leaves the self "besieged" by the "governing impotence of the worst moments"; Tainted Memory reenacts the moral compromise, the unpredictability, and total self-reliance involved in just staying alive; and Unheroic Memory finally unmasks the "diminished self left with the heritage of past discords that cannot be orchestrated into present and prospective harmonies."

Langer's use of poetic language masks the controversial nature of his claims. To begin with, they fly in the face of common sense. Anyone who has communicated his thoughts both in writing and in live interviews knows that writing demands precision and accountability, while a person fielding questions tends to use clichés, to play for effect and affect. Memories spoken before a camera are schematic unless the interviewer comes armed with prior knowledge of the subject, and is prepared to challenge his informant and to keep up the pressure for a very long time. None of this is true of Yale's "open-ended, free-flowing interviewing process" (from the publicity brochure).

IS THERE nevertheless something that spoken testimony on a TV monitor reveals that cannot otherwise be known, some deeper truth that no other medium can fathom? Wanting to test Langer's hypothesis further, I made a trip to Yale and watched the video testimony of Samuel B., as he is so identified.* Samuel B. (for Bak) is a Vilna-born artist whom I happen to know, whose published memoir in Yiddish I have read, and the destruction of whose native city has been carefully documented. This is what I found:

Samuel B.'s spoken English, though not nearly so rich as his Yiddish, did not seem to pose an insurmountable barrier to communication. But he felt constrained in another way. Since he was there to talk about the Holocaust, he feared he was wasting the interviewer's time with his prewar and postwar experience. So Samuel B., who was born in 1933, begins his reminiscence in September 1939, deals briefly with the Soviet occupation, then skips to the German invasion of Russia in the summer of '41

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* Tape #T-618, cited with the permission of Yale University Library.

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before going on to the Holocaust period proper. Hardly a word here about the upper-crust Polish-speaking environment he came from. By contrast, his printed memoir (in *Di goldene keyt*, no. 98) stresses that environment, and stresses his family's estrangement from Yiddish and *yiddishkayt* until the day he and his mother were met on the way back from kindergarten by a Polish ruffian who spat in their face and cursed them as dirty Jews. The next day he was transferred to a Yiddish-speaking school.

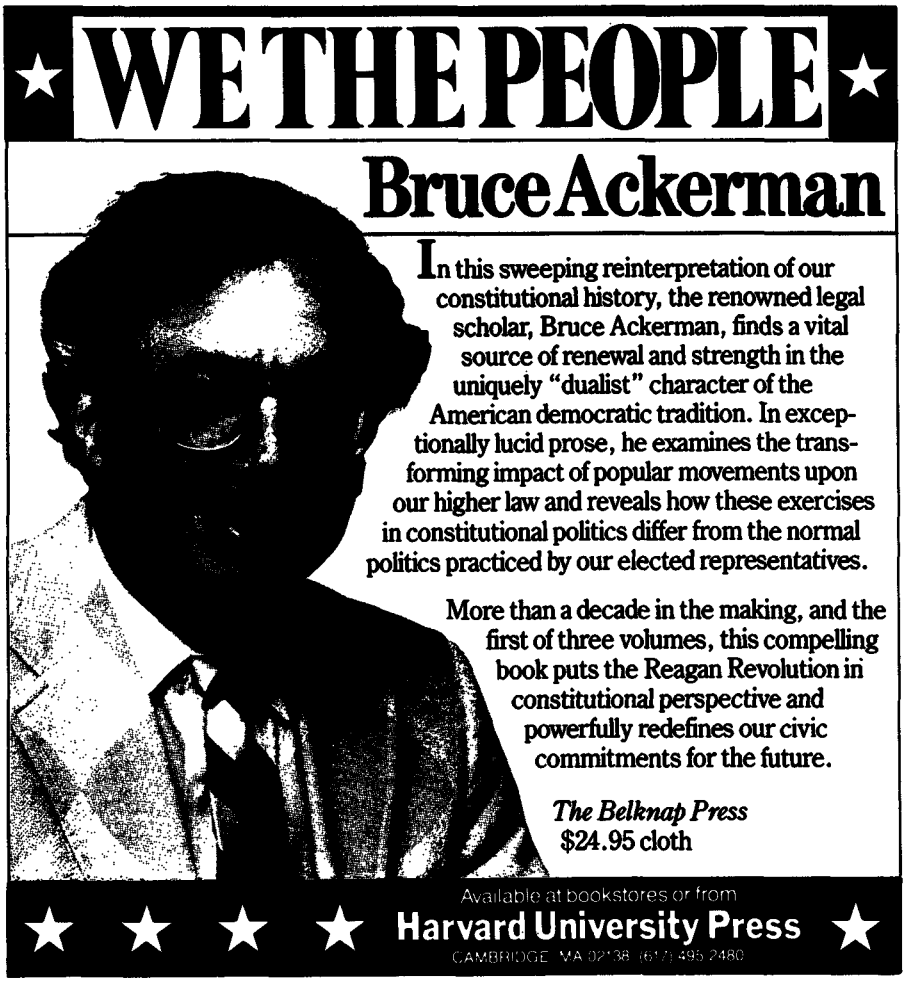
Here is a real discrepancy, for in the taped interview, Samuel B. repeatedly emphasizes that he knew not a word of Yiddish until he and his family were forced into the ghetto in autumn 1941 and that he had no formal education until he arrived in the Landsberg DP camp after the war. He has little to say on the tape about organized Jewish cultural life in the ghetto, but claims to have spent all his time painting and reading Polish and Russian books. He also speaks of Tom Sawyer, and especially of his attraction at the time to Christianity. Yet according to his memoir, in this same ghetto he learned "about the Jewish shtetl, the *heder*, the yeshiva and study house; about Jews with beards and *peyes*, the Jewish festivals; about biblical times, about Jews who once lived in the land of their forefathers."

NOWHERE in Langer's book is there a rubric for this kind of memory lapse. That is because neither he nor his interviewers are interested in their subjects as Jews. Holocaust survivors are seen by them as lone individuals, case studies in trauma and survival. (The Fortunoff Archive also contains the testimonies of non-Jewish witnesses.) To get at these people as Jews, one would have to conduct the interviews in their native language(s), draw them out about their parents, party affiliation, and prior schooling, and occasionally sit them down with other survivors from the same city, town, labor or death camp. Only in a group setting, for instance, would informants be likely to recall the songs that sustained them through those dark years. Folklore is the preserve of language, melody, and collective experience. These are some of the things the video archive at Yale has no access to.

Now, Langer would no doubt cite the discrepancy between Samuel B.'s spoken and written testimony to bolster his own argument. Because the memoir is written in Yiddish, Langer would say, and is titled "To Be a Jew . . . ," it soft-pedals the horror of the "roulette game" (in Samuel B.'s spoken phrase)—the struggle to stay alive during the Holocaust—covering it over with comforting, collective mythologies. The latter Langer consistently rejects in favor of the truth that supposedly lies buried in the taped interviews.

What Langer fails to see, however, is that the "truth" revealed by these live informants is determined by the nature of the interview itself. Speaking before a camera to an unknown audience concerned with his Holocaust-related experiences, Samuel B. constructs a small-scale *Bildungsroman* that begins with childhood innocence and ends with his rejecting the horrible implications of chosenness in the wake of the Holocaust. The Yiddish testimony moves in the opposite direction, from horror to reconciliation. The assimilated Jewish child first discovers his pariah status in Poland but ends as an adult Israeli affirming the beauty of Jewish experience.

So which version of the "truth" are we looking for: the individual, "universal" truth of the roulette game, or the "parochial" truth of one who has remained a Jew despite everything? In fact one would never know that there are competing truths at work were it not for the literary, historical, and linguistic background that Langer deems irrelevant. The author of three prior books on the literature of the Holocaust, Langer now claims that "literacy has little to do with the problem of entering into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meaningful intellectual or emotional dialogue with the contents of these videotaped testimonies." He even avers that historical writings, including the ghetto diaries of Emanuel Ringelblum, are just as suspect as personal memoirs. The only thing left for this professor of literature is to watch the witness reenact, not merely retell, the story of Auschwitz. What is left is the Holocaust as media event.

Moreover, just as, for Langer, the media image has displaced the written word, so Auschwitz—where, he asserts erroneously, the solitary individual was stripped of his past and patrimony, so that it no longer mattered where he came from and what cultural baggage he discarded at the ramps—has displaced all other points on the Holocaust compass. Langer's equation of the Holocaust with the fate of individuals in a single death camp explains why he has so little respect for the writings of Emanuel Ringelblum.

Ringelblum, who collected testimonies on that other slaughterhouse of European Jewry, Treblinka, was the first historian to recognize the full scope of the Nazi design. Seizing the opportunity that the Warsaw ghetto afforded as a dumping ground for refugees from far and wide, he organized a clandestine research team to conduct exhaustive interviews. Leaving nothing to chance (except the very real prospect of contracting typhus), his Yiddish- and Polish-speaking team came armed with detailed questionnaires that covered all aspects of the individual and communal Jewish fate in wartime. When enough data had been collected, the interviewer was set to work writing a monographic study of a particular community. The archive became a central repository for postwar memorial volumes to the martyred communities of Europe.

These authentic writings of the Nazi occupation, which should form the bedrock of Holocaust memory, do not figure anywhere in Lawrence Langer's four book-length studies—or, for that matter, in Paul Fussell's *Norton Book of Modern War* (1990). In lieu of them, Langer draws his inspiration from the "gnomic fragments" of the French critic Maurice Blanchot, whose almost impenetrable prose inspires Langer to disassemble Holocaust memory into the five constituent parts noted above, to reject the word "survivor" (with its upbeat connotations) in favor of "former victim," and to offer the solitary, unassimilable truths and half-truths of Holocaust testimony as the source of a new, brutal Truth.

"Confrontation with these videotaped testimonies," Langer asserts, "begins in separate narrative and ends in collective memory." Yet this cannot be. For if, as he claims, these solitary faces on an otherwise blank screen defy the moral vocabulary of Western civilization and speak only as oracles of random victimization, then they are finally consumed by their own nihilism and cannot serve the purposes of "collective memory." The cumulative impact of all these "former victims" baring their souls to the merciless camera is to rob their lives and stories of any larger significance, and to consign the Holocaust to a purgatory outside the course of human events.

Was Samuel B.'s oral testimony, then, a futile gesture? As it happens, it did reveal to me one truth which his written memoir conceals. It revealed the open wound of his relationship to God. "I think I am religious," Samuel B. says in conclusion, "because I'm so mad with Him." And that goes far to explain the artist Samuel Bak's recurrent use in his paintings and drawings of broken Tablets of the Law: sometimes shot through with bullets, sometimes held together by metal strips, sometimes crumbling under the weight of Jewish history. These mutilated Tablets are the emblem of Bak's unresolved anger with the God who chose the Chosen People. The anger is worth knowing about, and the Yale testimony brings it to the fore, however fleetingly. But that testimony does not even begin to tell us how to understand the multiform sources of Samuel B.'s anger, let alone, despite everything, the religious art to which it has given rise.

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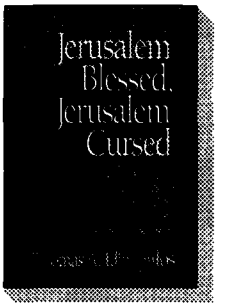

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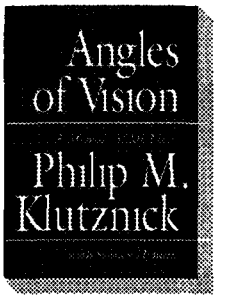

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Myths About Israel and the Middle East (2)

Should we re-examine endlessly repeated clichés?

In a previous installment in this series of clarifying messages about Israel and the Middle East, we examined certain myths which, by dint of constant repetition, had acquired currency and acceptance. We looked at the myth of "Palestinian nationhood", the myth of the Gaza Strip and Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") being "occupied territory", the myth that Jewish settlements in these territories are "the greatest obstacle to peace", and the myth that Israel is unwilling to "yield land for peace". And we cleared up the greatest myth of all, namely that Israel's administration of the territories and not Arab determination to destroy the state, is the root cause of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. But these are not all the myths; there are more.

What are some of these myths?

■ **Myth:** The Arabs of Israel are a persecuted minority without civil and political rights. **Reality:** The 700,000 non-Jews (mostly Arabs) who are citizens of Israel have the same civil rights that Jews have. They vote, are members of the Knesset (parliament), and are part of Israel's civil and diplomatic services. Arabs have full access to the Israeli legal, health and educational systems, including Arabic and Moslem universities. The only difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews is that the Jews must serve three years in the military and at least one month a year until age of 50. The Arabs have no such obligation. For them, military service is voluntary. But, very few avail themselves of the privilege.

■ **Myth:** Israel should give up Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") because strategic depth is meaningless in this age of missiles. **Reality:** Israel is a mini-state – about half the size of San Bernardino county in California. If another, even smaller mini-state were carved out of it, Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the opinion of 100 retired U.S. generals, and admirals as conveyed to the President of the U.S. If the Arabs were to occupy whatever little strategic depths Israel has between the Jordan River and its populated coast, they would not need any missiles. Artillery and mortars would suffice, since Israel would be only nine miles wide at its waist. Those who urge such a course either do not understand the situation or have a death wish for Israel.

■ **Myth:** If Israel would allow a Palestinian state to arise in Judea/Samaria and in the Gaza Strip it would be a democratic state and would be totally demilitarized. **Reality:** There is no prospect at all that anything resembling a democratic state could be created. There is not a single democratic Arab state – all of them are tyrannies of varying degrees. Even today, under Israeli administration, the PLO, the Islamic fundamentalists, and other factions fight for supremacy and ruthlessly murder each other. A country torn apart by civil strife like Lebanon is likely to be a much better prospect. As for demilitarization, it is totally unlikely that – with Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, all of which are in a declared state of war with Israel at its borders – a power vacuum would be possible. Despite pious promises, the arms merchants of the world would find a great new market and the neighboring hostile Arab countries would be happy to supply anything else that might be needed.

■ **Myth:** Israel should make "confidence building" gestures for the sake of peace. **Reality:** What really is it that the world expects Israel to do for the sake of peace? Twenty-one of the 22 Arab countries consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and don't even recognize its "existence". That has been going on for over 43 years. Wouldn't it be about time that the Arabs made some kind of a "gesture"? Could they not for instance terminate the state of war? Could they not finally abolish the economic boycott against Israel that has been in place for over 40 years – long before Israel came into the administration of the "West Bank"? Could they not stop the yearly charade of attempting the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations? Could they not withdraw that slanderous resolution ramroded about 16 years ago through the General Assembly of the United Nations that Zionism, the liberation movement of the Jewish people, is racism? Any single one of these would be such a "gesture", but none is forthcoming.

It appears likely that, sometime quite soon perhaps, the parties to the Mid-East conflict – Israel, the Arab nations, and the Arab residents of Judea/Samaria and the Gaza Strip – will finally get together in a peace conference. And chances are that all the old clichés will be trotted out, all the old myths resurrected in order to pressure Israel to make "concessions". Israel is America's staunchest ally and certainly its only true ally in that area of the world. It is in our national interest that stark reality, not myths, govern any peace negotiations.

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A Career in Literature

TRYING CONCLUSIONS: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS, 1961-1991. By HOWARD NEMEROV. *University of Chicago Press. 152 pp. $16.95.*

A HOWARD NEMEROV READER. *University of Missouri Press. 534 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by D.G. MYERS

DURING a 50-year career, Howard Nemerov, who died this past July, became one of the most widely honored poets in America. His *Collected Poems* (1977) received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Later volumes won the Bollingen Prize and a National Medal for the Arts in Poetry. He was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Academy of American Poets, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. For a year he was Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, and for two more years he was the nation's Poet Laureate. Nemerov's career was proof (if proof were needed) of the deference shown to poetry by the culture at large. His career is also a reminder, however, of the way in which such public recognition has all but replaced the actual reading of poetry. It suggests that the prizes and academies and laureateships—an institutionalized belief in poetry—may stand only as monuments to the passing of an art.

If so, Nemerov may also turn out to have been a prophet of its decline. The progress of all human experience, he implies in many of his poems, is from exploration and delight in the conditions of sheer activity to a hemmed-in, by-the-clock, practical concern. A fighter pilot in World War II, he saw this progress of experience in the history of human flight:

> Remember those wingovers and loops and spins?
> Forbidden. Heavy, powerful, and solemn,
> Our scheduled transports keep the straight and level.
> It's not the joystick now, but the control column.

D.G. MYERS *teaches English at Texas A&M University.*

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The same could be said for poetry. The central fact about poetry in the second half of the 20th century, Nemerov believed, was its movement from sacred to institutional status. At one time poets shared with Matthew Arnold the confidence that art would be the religion of the future. Their poems were distinguished by what, quoting Thomas Mann, Nemerov called the religious attitude, by an attentiveness and obedience—looking at the world and listening to what it had to say. Today it is doubtful whether many poets themselves believe in poetry as a sacred calling. It is even doubtful whether many take it seriously—or, for that matter, read it. Poetry has become a full-time career, a technology rather than a vocation.

By the logic of irony, Nemerov's own career conformed to the very pattern that dismayed him. Except for the war years, it passed entirely within the central institution of modern poetry, the English departments of American universities. Born in New York in 1920, Nemerov graduated in 1941 from Harvard, where he won the Bowdoin Prize for an essay on Thomas Mann. (Mann approvingly cited it in an afterword to a paperback edition of *The Magic Mountain*.) After the war, without ever intending to, Nemerov found himself committed to the academic life. He wandered into a job at Hamilton College, teaching literature to ex-GI's no younger than he. "Teacher and pupils were of an age, about twenty-six, and generally either friends or friendly, if only on the ground of deep and base suspicions of what we had got ourselves into."

Despite the suspicions, Nemerov stuck with it. Two years at Hamilton were followed by a decade at Bennington (where he taught alongside the critics Kenneth Burke and Stanley Edgar Hyman and the novelist Bernard Malamud, among others); then a brief hitch at Brandeis preceded his appointment in 1969 to the faculty of Washington University in St. Louis, where he stayed on, eventually being elevated to an endowed chair.

Perhaps what redeemed Nemerov himself from the technological curse was his conviction that the teaching and making of poems were in truth two forms of the same activity. As he wrote about the painter Paul Klee:

> For such a man, art is an act of faith:
> Prayer the study of it, as Blake says,
> And praise the practice; nor does he divide
> Making from teaching, or from theory.
> The three are one. . . .

He could have been speaking of himself. For Nemerov poetry was a way of life—a daily regimen, a dedication to an end, an ethical ideal. In this respect, for him it *was* like a religion. And like a religion it placed certain duties upon him, including the duty to teach. (Also to theorize: Nemerov wrote several volumes' worth of literary criticism.) In being an academic, Nemerov was not taking shelter in a comfortable and undemanding institution. No careerist, he simply took his career seriously.

Trying Conclusions is the fourteenth book of poems in a career that started with *The Image and the Law* (1947), although the selections from his work begin in the present volume with *The Next Room of the Dream* (1962). *A Howard Nemerov Reader* also contains ten poems from the earlier volumes. Together these two books are a convenient introduction to his body of writing.

Nemerov may be at his most characteristic in brief poems in which he wonders about the things of this world which are least wondered about: waiting rooms (aren't the rooms in which we spend most of our lives the real waiting rooms, in which we wait for death?); people driving fast cars (do they realize that they themselves are sitting still?); pockets (what sense does it make to speak of a hole in a pocket? what is a pocket but a hole?); and the fall of leaves (at what signal?). When he writes autobiographically, as contemporary poets often do, he tends to write about his sons, his students, his colleagues, or his friends. *In propria persona* he rarely appears, and then only as someone out taking a walk, meditating perhaps on the scene. In his last

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poems he returns to the war or, carrying out the duties of a poet laureate, pens an ode to the U.S. Congress.

Nemerov's poems range from four-line epigrams to leisurely essays in verse, and are normally written in decasyllabic blank verse, although he was hardly strict about it. He wrote a great deal, perhaps too much; he never shied away from trying something new, experimenting with forms and subjects; the aim was to keep writing, writing to the end. For him, perfection of the life was *in* the work.

It should not be surprising, then, that although Nemerov is at his most characteristic in his short poems, he is at his strongest in the longer essayistic ones in which he speculates on the theme of art. At their best, these poems are not so much well-made as they are ruminating and discursive; not so much astonishing as engaging. Although they tend to lack what Nemerov himself valued most in poetry—"the quality of decisiveness and finish, of absolute completion to which nothing need be added nor could be added"—they compensate with a quality no less essential to human conversation: the will to continue thinking. The loss is finish; the gain (now and again) is wisdom.

Nemerov wrote several of these poems to express his response to another artist: Vermeer, Frost, Brueghel, Bach and Casals, Philip Larkin. Even his moving epitaph "To D———, Dead by Her Own Hand" provokes deeper reflection when one realizes that it is about Nemerov's younger sister Diane Arbus, the photographer who committed suicide in 1971.

WHEN he himself died on July 5, 1991, at the age of seventy-one, Howard Nemerov took his place near the end of a line of writers for whom literature was not only a sacred calling but all-important and perhaps all-sufficient. His ideas, his activities, were almost purely literary—when he was not writing poetry, he was writing criticism or fiction. (Only about 10 percent of *A Howard Nemerov Reader* is given over to the poetry. The remainder is made up of eight stories, fifteen essays, and a novel, complete and unabridged.) Few literary figures at any time have been so bent upon unifying the diffuse activities of literature into a single career. Today, when the activities of literature are divided up among specialists, the type is rarer still. It is difficult to imagine a young man, an ex-fighter pilot who wishes to make a mark in the world, choosing today to devote himself to a purely literary career.

And so it may happen that Howard Nemerov will come to be remembered more as a historical curiosity, as the end of a line, than as a poet. That would be a pity. "[N]ow on your turning page," he wrote for Robert Frost, "the lines blaze with a constant light. . . ." Nemerov's lines do not always blaze, but their light is steady and bright enough to see by.

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Inside Dopes

DANGEROUS LIAISON: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE U.S.-ISRAELI COVERT RELATIONSHIP. By ANDREW and LESLIE COCKBURN. *HarperCollins. 416 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by
ANGELO M. CODEVILLA

THIS book is no less than a history of the world since 1948, with the United States of America cast as the chief evildoer, and Israel as the evil genie. As the Cockburns see it, Israel, playing Iago to America's Othello, has brought out the worst in this stupid, great power. Israel's leaders, unprincipled, cynical addicts to military force and dirty tricks, manipulate America through American Jews—"women with blue hair and pseudo-athletic men." These Jews have so corrupted America's politics with their money that U.S. Presidents, too, have been led to betray our national interests by joining in massive coverups of Israeli misdeeds, including the illegal transfer of U.S. military technology on a scale "much bigger than Pollard."

The U.S. government, however, is only one of Israel's many manipulees. According to this book, Stalin himself may have been goaded into the cold war by Israel's use of Soviet and Czechoslovak Jews for espionage. In 1967, Israel plainly hoodwinked Nasser into words and deeds that lent cover to Israel's own premeditated seizure of Arab lands. In 1990-91, Saddam Hussein started the Gulf War not out of any desire for Kuwait and Saudi Arabia but because of his belief in "a conspiracy between Israel and the U.S. to attack him"—a belief that this book says is "correct." And then there is Israel's culpability for Idi Amin, Mobutu, Noriega, the plight of the Kurds, the suffering of Guatemalans, and much, much more.

How do these inside dopesters account for so much evil commit-

ANGELO M. CODEVILLA *is a fellow of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. His most recent book is* Espionage: Informing Statecraft in a New Century *(The Free Press).*

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ted by one tiny country? Mostly by fabricating quotations, twisting logic, and imputing guilt for nonexistent enormities. Take the case of the Kurds. During the 1970's, the U.S. sent arms to the Kurds at the behest of the Shah of Iran, but without any intention of seeing the Kurds through to safety. Then the U.S. left the Kurds to the tender mercies of Saddam Hussein. What does this have to do with Israel? Well, during the 1960's, Israel had helped the Kurdish resistance within Iraq and, write the Cockburns, "it seems unlikely that Israeli sentiments were any less cynical." Period.

Israel's "connection" with the Medellin drug cartel is made of similar stuff. According to *Dangerous Liaison*, there exists an Israeli company called "Spearhead," composed of former commanders of anti-terrorist units who teach their craft to foreign "governments or official organizations." In August 1989, the Colombian police are said to have seized from "one of Colombia's most prominent drug lords" a "home movie" that showed Spearhead's training exercises. There follow four pages built on the assumption that the Israelis were working for the cartel. But there is no explanation of this alleged relationship, let alone an explanation of how or by whom the film was made, or of how it got into the cartel's hands. The authors mention only "an internal report" of the Colombian police that "links" the Colombian army and the cartel, and indicates that Israeli trainers were in Colombian army camps. Since A is "linked" with B and B is "linked" with C, A and C must be "linked" too. The conclusion? "Colombians called it 'the labyrinth,' and until their Hebrew commands were recorded on tape, the men from Spearhead navigated it well." The implication is obvious: the Israelis were caught redhanded training drug lords to kill. Yet the careful reader notices that the book does not contain a single fact to support this implication.

EVEN flimsier is the Cockburns' allegation that Israel helped Guatemala in "the cruel and systematic destruction of the Indian population there," an allegation once again unbuttressed by the mention of anything that any Israeli actually did in Guatemala. (The average newspaper reader will also object that there has been no attempt by anyone to destroy the Indian population of Guatemala, and that, for better or worse, the Guatemalan army is composed of and led by Indians, while the leftist guerrillas there are largely white middle-class intellectuals.) For the source of their factoids on Guatemala, the authors cite . . . "the *Monthly*, Berkeley, Ca., 11/85." Just so, for proof that the Israeli government, contrary to its stated policy, regularly recruits foreign Jews for espionage, they cite the thoroughly discredited former Mossad trainee, Victor Ostrovsky.* To document Israeli complicity in South Africa's policy of apartheid they refer us to the Congressional Black Caucus. And so forth.

The Cockburns are as loose with the references they actually reproduce as with those they merely cite. For example, they quote a passage from a CIA report concerning a mysterious flash off the coast of South Africa in 1979; according to the report, the flash *might* have been a nuclear explosion, South Africa *might* have been responsible, and in order to bring off such a thing South Africa *might* have benefited from scientific cooperation with Israel. From this the Cockburns conclude that the CIA *knows* that South Africa and Israel jointly tested a nuclear-tipped missile (no less!) and that the U.S. government "energetically covered [it] up."

WHY, in general, do Israel and the United States collude? Because, say the Cockburns, the military-industrial complexes of both countries *need* war, in order to maintain their privileged positions in society. That is why the leaders of both countries were so disturbed by the demise of the conflict with the Soviet Union. "It was not just the men from Israel Defense Industries who had seen the arrival of world peace as 'apocalyptic.' " In the Pentagon, too, there ensued a desperate search for enemies. Hence, Iraq. "Desert Shield was more popularly referred to inside the Pentagon as 'Budget Shield. . . .' The threat of peace and consequent budget cuts had been dramatically staved off." And in Israel, say the Cockburns, the Gulf War of 1991 brought with it the semi-serious prospect of selling Iraq "replacements for all the weapons that the Americans destroyed"—a prospect very much in the spirit of the U.S.-Israeli relationship as conceived in this book.

The problem with *Dangerous Liaison* is that, like Victor Ostrovsky's *By Way of Deception*, it was published by a reputable house, was well received by the New York *Times*, and that American colleges are turning out people with the historical ignorance and lack of critical skills, and with the moral disorientation, to believe its message.

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* See my review of his book, *By Way of Deception*, in the December 1990 COMMENTARY.

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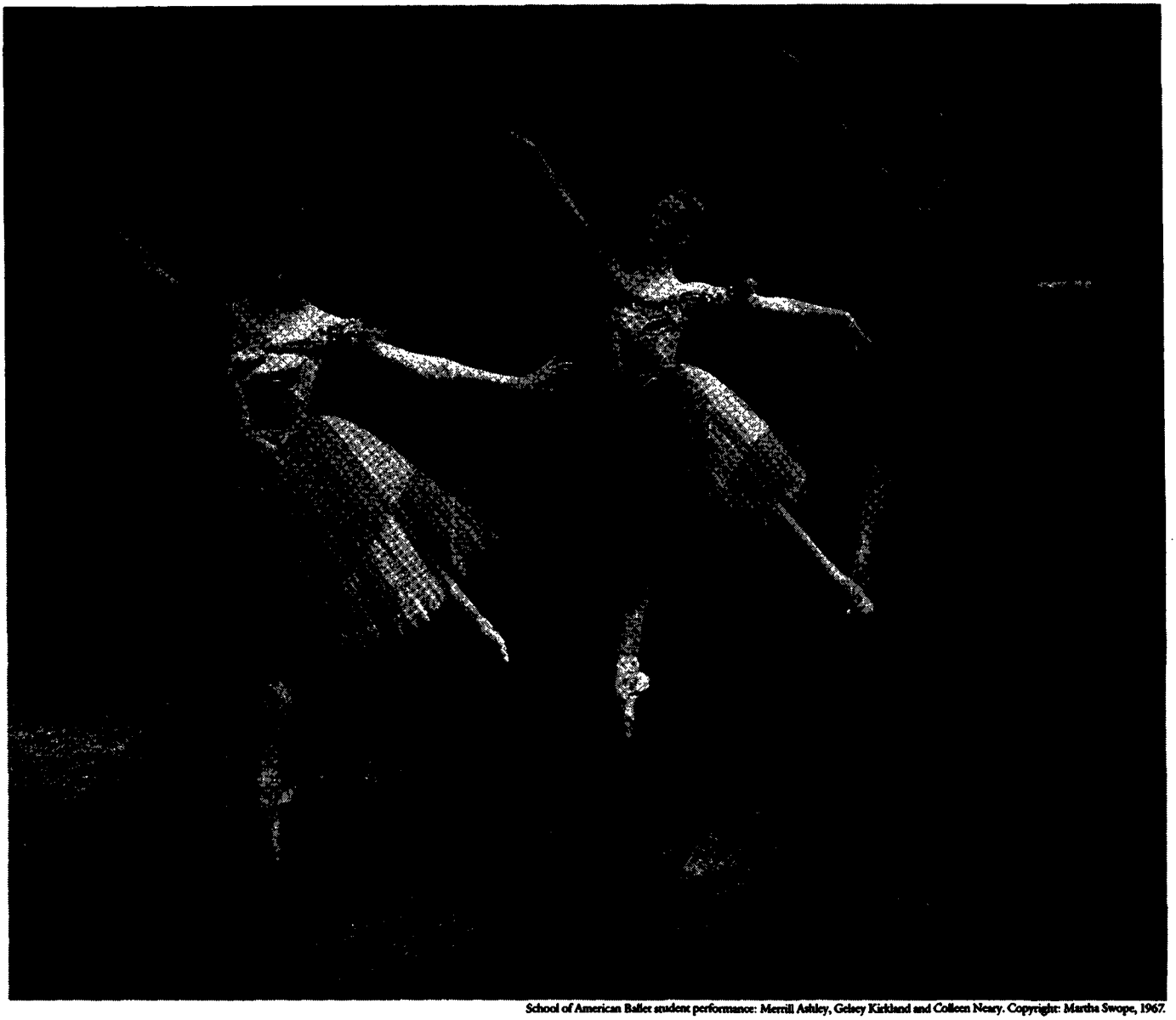

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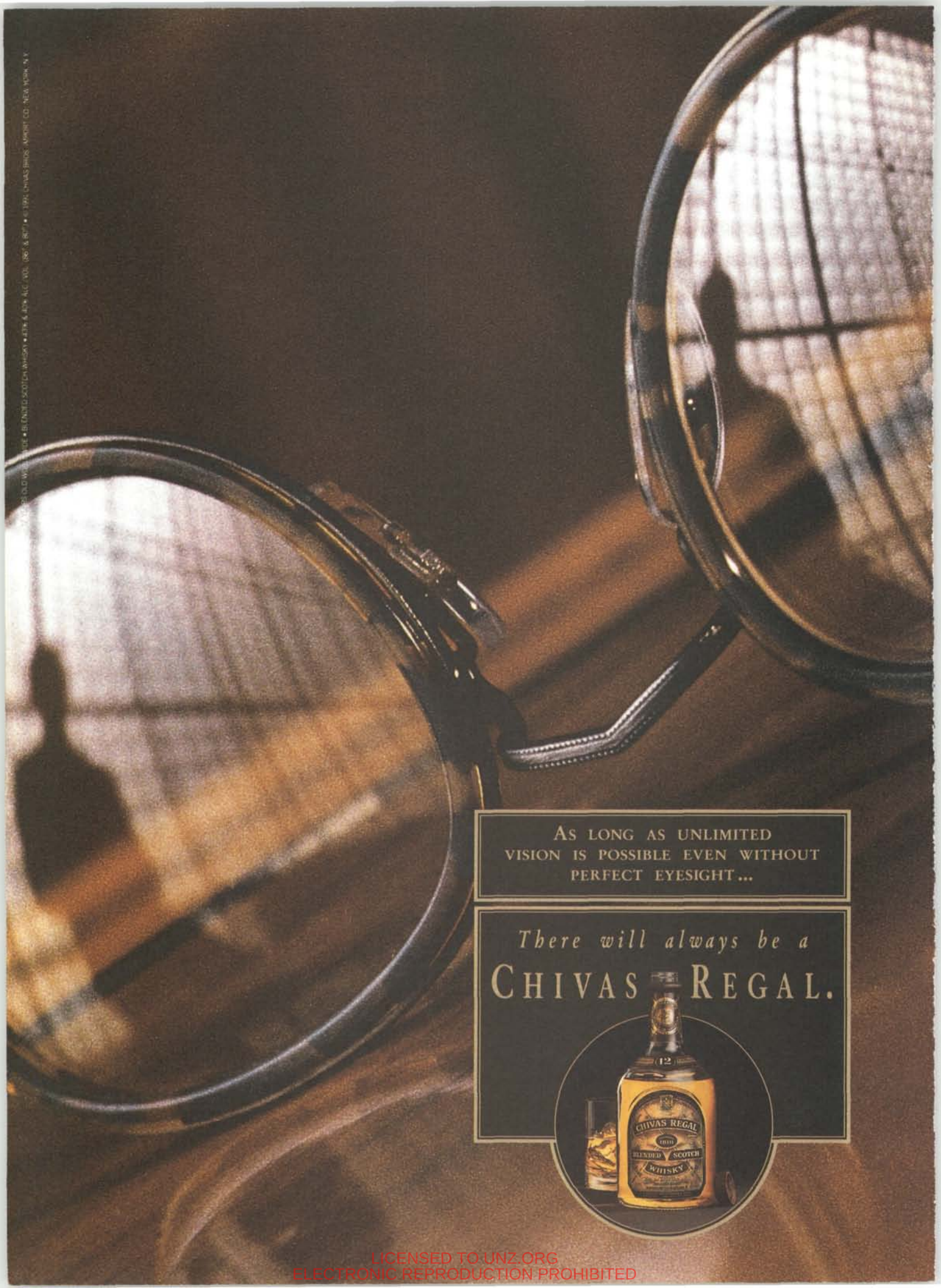

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